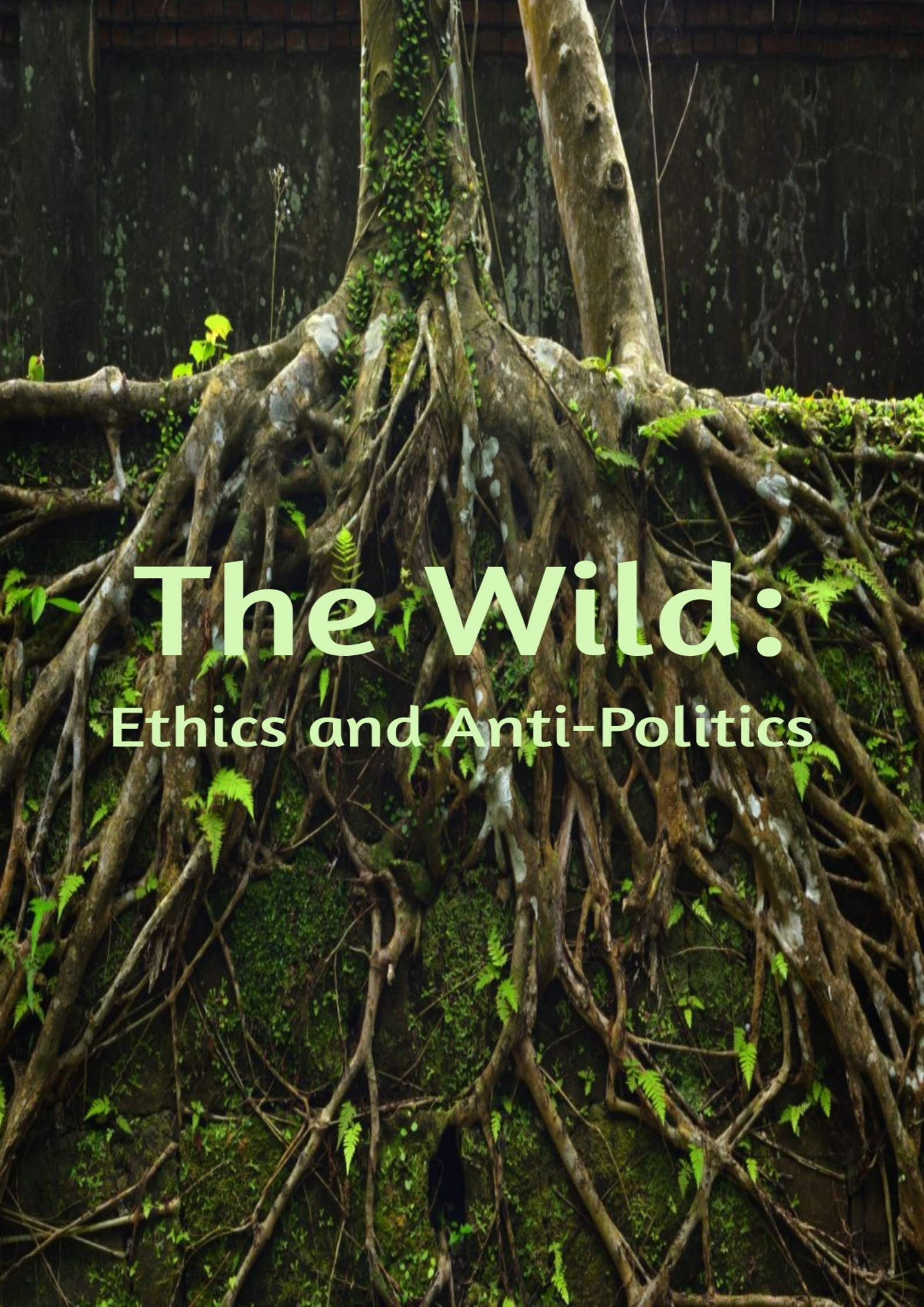

The Wild:

Ethics and Anti-Politics

“The unexamined life is not worth living. “

(Socrates)

“Love in freedom is the only condition of a beautiful life.”

(Emma Goldman)

“What is freedom? To have the will to be responsible for oneself.”

(Max Stirner)

“... in Wildness is the preservation of the World...”

(Henry David Thoreau)

“Anarchism... can never come about save through the conquest of men’s minds.”

(Voltairine de Cleyre)

“...civilisation is the trap into which desire keeps falling...”

(The Screwball Asses)

“...desire is pesky...”

(Anonymous)

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PRELUDE

I have been writing on anarchy constantly for about ten years now. Or, at least, by the time this book is done, I will have been. Thus, it perhaps makes sense that, after ten years of almost constant activity, I take a look back at where I have come from and where I have been. But this is not only to look back. For it is also to ask where I have got to and where I seem to have been going all along. None of us really choose our paths in life. We simply fall into things and either keep going, stop, or just go in another direction. Very few of us ever seem to have any clear idea of where we are going or what for. Even fewer probably realise that it might actually make less difference than we think. Memento mori.

But there is another impetus to this book as well. Thirty years ago, in 1995, the then self-proclaimed anarchist, Murray Bookchin, wrote a short book called *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm* (SALA). It was a very polemical book and it exampled various, then contemporary, anarchists with whom the author was exceedingly displeased. What people (except those very close to Bookchin at the time such as his partner and assistant, Janet Biehl) didn't realise was that Bookchin had actually ceased to be an anarchist because, as he looked around him, particularly in terms of self-termed anarchist action and anarchist writing, he saw a phenomenon to which he no longer felt related. Bookchin, of course, was primarily known for two things: social ecology and municipal confederalism, the confused twin conclusion that social and political progress must be grounded in ecologically sensitive activity yet whilst retaining our city-based and civilised political structure. Bookchin, in something he more originally thought of as anarchism, wanted people to be ecologically and politically involved. But when he looked around and saw that lots of other people who called themselves anarchists flat refused, or refuted, his answers to anarchist questions, it just left him alienated and disgusted.

Bookchin termed the anarchism he liked, and had previously felt a part of, “social anarchism” (linking it to past figures such as Bakunin and Kropotkin) and the anarchism he despised he termed “lifestyle anarchism”, a disparaging term he linked to those he imagined had selfish, narcissistic, anti-rational, ephemeral, primitivist, mysticist or excessively personally autonomous interpretations of anarchy. In fact, if you read SALA what you find is constant lists of adjectives by which Bookchin refers to those he finds anarchistically insufficient. This begins with the charge, which Bookchin takes seriously from an anarchistic point of view, that such people “are no longer socialists” – as if being “a socialist” was something an anarchist inherently had to be. This would certainly come as news to some who imagined themselves to be anarchists – then as now (and probably as always). It is here pertinent to point out, then, that Bookchin had begun his own political journey under the sway of Marxism and revolutionary communism. He only came to something he thought of as anarchism along the way after several years. What this meant practically is that when any anarchists came along, as they were always going to, who foregrounded personal autonomy (even in the face of things like democratic majorities), Bookchin was always bound to have opposed them. If they despised civilisation and self-directed their own lives in ways that merely seemed good to them, the much more programmatic Bookchin could hardly do more than find them superficial and frivolous, abusing them as bohemians and gadflies in the process. And that’s exactly what he did.

Bookchin was largely dismissed as a grumpy old man for his published outburst. (Today he would be the face of the meme “OK Boomer” – he was in his mid 70s when he published SALA.) It presaged other missives, both in book and essay form, as he argued the toss of this back and forth for a couple of years. Yet Bookchin would eventually begin calling himself a “Communalist” instead as a way of labelling his personal ideas of (formerly)

anarchist theory concerning social ecology and a politics based on, and in, cities. He then dismissed anarchism entirely as lost to “Ad hoc adventurism, personal bravura, an aversion to theory oddly akin to the antirational biases of postmodernism, celebrations of theoretical incoherence (pluralism), a basically apolitical and anti-organizational commitment to imagination, desire, and ecstasy, and an intensely self-oriented enchantment of everyday life.” It would be easy to say that Bookchin seemed averse to people having a good time – and some people did say that. Not for him the “Temporary Autonomous Zone” of Hakim Bey (one of his major targets in SALA). Bookchin was a serious man who took politics seriously. Apparently too seriously. No “Eat and drink for tomorrow we die” here. He seemed to hate that people weren’t as rational and serious as he was about what he was rational and serious about. So he called it, and the people doing it, unserious and accused them of “juvenile antics”. This was, in other words, a typical Marxist dismissal of anyone purveying anything but “the program” as bourgeois or decadent.

Consequently, some have argued (I feel entirely correctly) that Bookchin did this because, for all he ever imagined himself “an anarchist”, it is questionable he had ever really understood what that means. Bob Black, someone Bookchin absolutely should have criticised along with the likes of Hakim Bey in SALA but didn’t, wrote an entire book (*Anarchy After Leftism*) in response to Bookchin in which he basically stated that Bookchin was still a Marxist, was not an anarchist, and was actually also a statist – something explicitly anti-anarchist. Bookchin, with his municipal confederalism, thought people should stand for election and infiltrate mainstream political and electoral bodies with the aim of turning them against their more mainstream concerns. As Janet Biehl then reports of her former partner in 2007 after his death, Bookchin repeatedly got replied to by anarchists on this front with the statement that “anarchists don’t take part in politics and

they certainly don't vote or stand for office." It would seem that Bookchin eventually got sick of hearing this but, rather than consider the truth of the assertion, he ploughed on regardless. Black would argue, and does in *Anarchy After Leftism*, that this is because he was a dogmatic Marxist and a statist, a city-statist. Neither of these things are anarchist (or, it is arguable, are compatible with anarchism either). Bookchin eventually seems to have concluded the same thing, if with some disdain for those he chose to leave behind.

Bookchin's forced and artificial binary choice was, of course, entirely arbitrary. It was the choice of what Bookchin imagined an authentic, historically socialist, anarchism anchored by reference to iconic figures in Bakunin and Kropotkin – or something of no substance in Bookchin's mind exactly because it wasn't his own suitably earnest, august and rational ideas of social ecology and municipal confederalism set in this context which he thought were of substance. His choice examples how dogmatic Bookchin was (note he gives no alternatives in his theory. Its this or nothing) because, I conjecture, of his own past and journey nurtured, as it was, by Marxist-socialist verities in which personal choice or individuality were seen negatively as bourgeois in an analysis based on class. His emphasis on socialism then comes entirely from Marxism (which studies things systematically) and he writes as if personal autonomy is an irrelevance to the social because he sees personal autonomy and social freedom as in opposition rather than as complementary or necessarily interactive. His focus on political solutions – in terms of getting involved in the standing political system – then only raises great suspicion amongst those of wider anarchist education or proclivity when anarchists from time immemorial have campaigned against exactly such a thing without any subterfuge whatsoever. Bookchin, for example, reacts with shock when talking about one of his targets (L. Susan Brown) because she apparently speaks in favour of "individual rights over – *and against* – those of the collective" (his emphasis). It never occurs to Bookchin that, specifically in anarchism, there

is no collective except of the individually willing, much less a dogmatic one, but he assumes it unquestioningly anyway. Indeed, he even assumes the consequences of it:

"*If individual 'autonomy' overrides any commitment to a 'collectivity,' there is no basis whatever for social institutionalization, decision-making, or even administrative coordination. Each individual, self-contained in his or her 'autonomy,' is free to do whatever he or she wants – presumably, following the old liberal formula, if it does not impede the 'autonomy' of others. Even democratic decision-making is jettisoned as authoritarian.*"

Now all this triggers reflective insights gleaned from ten solid years in the literary remains of anarchist writers in me. The sources from which I drew my anarchism were certainly wider than merely Bakunin and Kropotkin (seemingly Bookchin's two unimpeachable sources but ones I quickly hurried past, having understood what they were about – see my own sources and influences in this regard later in this book) and they included not a trace of Marxism at all. (Here it is amusing to me to realise that many I have read with benefit and thought of as fellow travellers were people Bookchin explicitly despised, insulted or decried.) So if, as a result of all this, I ask myself, for example, what anarchism is when reduced to a minimum, I come up with something like the following:

1. It is self-organisation.
2. Because it is self-organisation (which, as I insist, can and should be understood individually *and* socially), it is, and must always be, voluntary. Anarchy is the principle of anti-authoritarianism or voluntarism.

I come by these two principles not from some bourgeois liberal with a penchant for self-absorption or primitivistic and anti-rational mysticism but from none other than Italian

social anarchist, Errico Malatesta (a figure strangely missing from Bookchin's references. Perhaps he was either too forthright or too in the shadow of Bakunin and Kropotkin to mention?). It was Malatesta who wrote the anarchy-distilling sentences:

"*We do not want to emancipate the people. We want the people to emancipate themselves.*"

Anarchists, in other words, are not just one more group of people who want to run the show. They are not authorities with better morals. Anarchists want you to run your own, self-directed, show. They want you to take responsibility for being your own authority. This, so it seems to me, precludes all government. It precludes deferring to majorities. It precludes external authoritative institutions. It is genuine, voluntaristic, self-organisation. Therefore:

3. Anarchy is the constant struggle against any and all centralising power and the determination to live free of it for yourselves by your own direct action, come what may.

Bookchin, in SALA, says:

"*Denigrating rational, discursive, and direct-democratic procedures for collective decision-making as 'dictating' and 'ruling' awards a minority of one sovereign ego the right to abort the decision of a majority. But the fact remains that a free society will either be democratic, or it will not be achieved at all.*"

He is right in the first sentence but horribly wrong in the second and dismisses 99% of human history (when people were not "civilised" or, according to him, particularly "rational" either and never considered that all society had to be one or about everyone

being under the same political dispensation) in doing so. He comes across as the dogmatic Marxist statist Bob Black accuses him of being in *Anarchy After Leftism*. For in such commentary it is totally clear that Bookchin only ever sees the group and never the people that make it up. It is almost as if there is only a group and the individuals have had their individuality removed from them. That might make them easier to control but said beings are no longer humans any more if so. What makes you human is precisely that you decide, and can decide, for yourself. And that always includes the necessary jeopardy of disagreement or even complete diversion. Agreement should never be assumed. Yet Bookchin finds studied and consistent disagreement, failure to acquiesce to the majority will, seemingly repugnant in SALA. One wonders why. If he gets to choose his own path and walk it then why don't others? We must conclude its because he values his dogma of one sociality (whether you personally agree with it or not) above those pesky real people with other opinions (however much he bleats about their freedom to be heard). His form of "social anarchism" ultimately erases personal self-determination in beings constituted as exactly self-determinative. Consequently, when talking about himself and those like him, its a matter of "serious organizations, a radical politics, a committed social movement, theoretical coherence, and programmatic relevance" but when he's talking about the others its a matter of "spray-can graffiti, postmodernist nihilism, antirationalism, neoprimitivism, anti-technologism, neo-Situationist 'cultural terrorism,' mysticism, and a 'practice' of staging Foucauldian 'personal insurrections.'" OK Boomer.

I do not intend to go into Bookchin's views, and Bob Black's evisceration of them in *Anarchy After Leftism*, any further though. You have the sources and can easily go into them for yourself if you so wish. I merely introduce that argument as a way into a discussion of my own understanding of anarchy, how it came to be, what its about and how (or even if) it makes sense. This is something that I, as someone who saw something

useful in the self-designation “anarchist”, think should always be up to you to decide for yourself. What it has allowed me to set out, however, is a simple set of three principles which we will go forward with in the rest of the book. And it has allowed me to suggest that I am interested in ANARCHY rather than ANARCHISM, the latter of which, as an ideology, is always prone to becoming the next dogma. (And, for far too many, it does.)

“Anarchy” I regard as an ethos, a context, a state of existence, a non-ideology, an anti-politics, and, as will become clear, A WILDNESS. It has few premises, few doctrines, and refuses to be dogmatic. Anarchism seems inferior by comparison, a dead letter, something inevitably fated to be superseded almost as soon as it is enunciated. I am here to talk about reality, about nature, about life, about the wild, about everything. And all of it is anarchy. What you do in and with it is never up to anyone but YOU. No wonder the dogmatic rationalist and statist Murray Bookchin ended up hating it.

WILD SHOOTS

1. Rhizomatic Contexts, Relational Purposes

This book begins in many places which might end up rhizomatically coming together, revealing themselves as roots, and in this first of several introductions/orientations I will reference several of them. A first component of this rhizomatic mass is the ancient Greek Cynic, Hipparchia, the only female Cynic history remains aware of and, who knows, perhaps the only ever female Greek Cynic there ever was. (She is, in fact, the only female philosopher with her own dedicated sections in Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*.) History, however, does not remember very much directly about either Hipparchia or the Cynics in general. As is the nature of the case, people were not going around more than two millennia ago contemporaneously writing down anyone's words or life herstory simultaneously on the spot – and especially where those people were themselves peripatetic. Rather, transmission was oral and based on memory and narrative. (I have written a lot more about this in my research about Jesus of Nazareth, a subject in which I was once an academic student.) This gives the transmitted accounts a fictional and anecdotal bent which often disturbs the modern historical thinker in their childish and unnecessary need for "certainty" and "objective reality". We might observe, however, that what is remembered about people is also its own testimony and bears witness to its own historical truths and such is likely the case in regard to Hipparchia too.

Hipparchia is remembered first and foremost as a Cynic in her brief depictions. Therefore, all that is true of Cynics (about which I write repeatedly in every book at some point or other) can be regarded as true of Hipparchia as well. She comes to attention because her affections fall on one Crates, a Cynic philosopher of old age who was taught directly by

Diogenes, the archetypal Cynic known as “the dog”, and, scandalously for her time and culture (a Cynic trait), she declares that she wishes to “marry” him which means refusing all the younger and more eligible suitors that are, no doubt, petitioning her father to become her husband and, incidentally, also the new dominant male in her life.

Do not be fooled here, then, by the word “marry” in terms of the imagined relation between Hipparchia and Crates – for it neither means there what you think it means nor does it mean what it would mean if Hipparchia was handed off to one of the eligible suitors either. Instead, it means that which I have discussed in my book *Black Dog* (pp.130-136) as “kynogamia” – “dog marriage”. This was a Cynic, countercultural understanding of heterosexual partnerships in which women, usually the effective possessions of men in Greek society (either father or husband), were regarded as agents in their own cause, people of their own agency. (The Greeks understood this as “shared” rather than the exclusive possession of one man but the consequence is agency for and of the woman which was not the case in the traditional system of relations.) This fits the story of Hipparchia well for she presumes to take her own “husband” rather than be assigned one by her father and to live as her “husband’s” equal. That it appears Crates was also far her senior in years (indicating an age gap relationship) only adds to the scandal (then and now). This probably did not upset the Cynic partners unduly, however, for they are said to have shamelessly fucked in public in good Cynic fashion in consummation once Hipparchia had proved her love of Crates’ life and philosophy to the extent that she even wore him down in his attempts to dissuade her at her parents’ instigation. Cynicism, like so many other things, was apparently thought a “manly” pursuit and so unsuitable for Hipparchia in its embracing of the harsh, natural life. She did not agree and Crates therefore offered her the Cynic life of nothing but what nature provides – which she duly accepted.

There was then a strong sense of refusal of gender roles and of cultural traditions of relations in Hipparchia's character and actions which no doubt lends her to remembrance. She stands out exceptionally as an example of that Cynicism famed for "changing the currency" of human social, cultural and political understanding in which the aim is to live "according to nature" rather than according to custom or civilisation. Hipparchia clearly had no problems adapting to the Cynic requirement for *anaideia* – shamelessness – and a further anecdote about her, an argument with one Theodorus in which he challenged her right to attend a symposium, demonstrates this further for, when the latter seemed bested in logic by Hipparchia, he attempted to shame her and cause her disgrace by exposing her nudity. Theodorus was evidently a conservative and a chauvinist but Hipparchia showed neither shame nor disgrace in her response and apparently saw nothing remarkable in her exposed state – which again is a very Cynic response but also one which flies in the face of Greek gendered cultural propriety. Hipparchia, as in fact she made the case to Theodorus, thought that what was good for a man was also good for a woman too. She thus took a stance against such gendered distinctions and valuations and judgments of appropriateness. In context, this means Hipparchia essentially "lived as a man" in political and cultural terms for she recognised no distinctions. Listening to, or participating in, philosophical debate was a male activity, for example, but Hipparchia actively defied this and so followed the lead of Diogenes who is reported to have argued that just as men trained naked in the Gymnasium, so women should be allowed to as well.

A second component of my rhizomatic mass is the work of my former teacher, Stephen D. Moore, which I now follow from afar through his literary output. He, of which he is entirely unaware, is the reason I am writing now for it was he, first and foremost, who ever recognised any substance or insight in anything I ever had to say. Since I knew him in the late nineties he has gone on to write about many weird and wonderful things – as is

his way – and I have too. This wasn't my way before I had met Stephen Moore but, rather, it was he who gave me the confidence to become a writer – and one unafraid to use the personal voice in so doing as well. If my content is somewhat related to threads Moore pulled at a certain time in my life which I have continued to pull or to utilise for my own ends ever since, then my style is more directly attributable to him and his tales of his butcher father or interactions with the Irish myths of his homeland (Moore is Irish). Reading him again recently, I found that he had authored work on the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (*The Bible After Deleuze: Affects, Assemblages, Bodies*) with a chapter of that addressing "SEX (a thousand tiny sexes, a trillion tiny Jesuses)", a subject integral to my own work. "What's that got to do with the Bible?" was, of course, the question that immediately appeared in my mind (as it always did for it is Moore's way to talk about things seemingly nothing to do with his ostensible subject of enquiry as a biblical scholar – the Bible – but then to surprise you when it turns out to actually be very relevant). But what Moore often gives is not so much traditional or anti-traditional readings of texts so much as new ways for reading them or methods for interpreting them or contexts to set them in. So here in this essay with his Deleuzian queer and libidinal reading.

This essay on a Deleuzian appreciation of sex "explores one of the less-travelled roads of queer critical thought in general" and is complementary to the Foucauldian queer path taken up by the likes of Judith Butler in her writing. This centres on Deleuze's notion of "the virtual" rather than Foucault's discursive or Butler's performative ideas. What Moore describes here, first and foremost, is "The Deleuzian Queer", a consequence of human beings being "desiring-machines" that require "an unlimited number of connections" (to quote Deleuze's sometimes academic partner, Felix Guattari). Moore tells us that Deleuze and Guattari together (pre-eminently in their famous treatises *A Thousand Plateaus* and *Anti-Oedipus*) have a "hyperconnective theory of desire" which places them at one

extreme end of a sexual spectrum which is also a “queer identity spectrum” – one which is profoundly “anti-identitarian”. (The essay’s title - “a thousand tiny sexes, a trillion tiny Jesuses” - should be a clue here.) Moore notes this, even in Butlerian guise, as an aspect of “queer” theorising itself. Quoting Lee Edelman, he notes that “queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one.” (See here also Nietzsche’s prejudice against being in favour of becoming which hangs in the shadows behind the work of both Foucault and Deleuze.) As Moore has this, however, this is not the popular end of the spectrum – for simply everyone wants to tell you “what they are”, everyone fixates on “identity”. Has anything ever been more fictionalised/virtualised than identity? And often for such bad reasons? All kinds of in-group languages and logics are manufactured simply in order that people can say “what they are”, the self-justifying mirror image to Foucault’s discursive arguments in his *History of Sexuality* which give a narrative in regard to how all kinds of people and sexualities were simply discursively invented in public discourse in order to produce a taxonomy of human being in a sexual reality. By such means we get the sexologist, Krafft-Ebing, inventing “masochism” (and so the masochist) simply because he was aware of the content of the novel *Venus in Furs* and gave various sexual desires the name of the book’s author, Sacher-Masoch – much to that author’s chagrin.

Moore thinks of “the proliferation of queer (counter)names, the ever more precise terminological encapsulation of sexual identities, sub-identities, and sub-sub-identities” as something which “should not be underestimated”. He imagines it a “sexual and hence social revolution”, something which creates “potent pockets of countercommunity within the larger society”. But he also imagines that the person who describes themselves as a “queer AFAB aromantic” (as a random example) is essentially no different to Krafft-Ebing: each is an imagineer manufacturing their own sexual reality and system of human relations (additionally, I go on to suggest, in a non-material space – for no biomedical,

materialist arguments are ever presented for these designations). One might here be trying to contain sexual otherness – as Krafft-Ebing was – and the other might be seeking to engage in "sexual self-realization" – but the means are essentially the same. Only the purposes are different.

Deleuze, it turns out, does not believe in "identity". He believes in difference, connection and "a complicated, properly chaotic world without identity" (to quote from his *Difference and Repetition* which Moore recommends as the best source text of this thesis). Deleuze, Moore explains, sees identity as sinister, the shadow of the authoritarian, for, now using my own words, the claim that something is a thing is the attempt to set reality in stone, to dogmatically fix it. And, politically, can one think of anyone who does that who is someone you should trust? One is reminded here of why Richard Rorty attempted to mark out an anti-authoritarian philosophy his whole life. The attempt to mark out the world, any attempt, is an authoritarian move, a step towards ossification, a move which obligates that everyone else see, and acknowledge, what you see and acknowledge and organise according to this fixed systematic. It is what leads to things like orthodoxy, heteronormativity, homonormativity and basically any "meganormativity". Such notions are anti-queer for queer is anti-normativity – even a queer normativity.

Consequently, Deleuze does not speak of the "normal" or the "abnormal". He is profoundly suspicious of such classificatory identity games. As Moore then notes:

"*Becoming marks the place of the queer—or, more precisely, names the process of queering—in Deleuzian thought. And identity is the antonym of becoming, in Deleuzese as in Deleuzoguattarese.*"

Moore, in the same essay, and still discussing the Deleuzian queer, moves on to the Deleuze-influenced book written by Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*. This was in a time before "identity politics" had even been invented (or, as Moore notes, the term had been expressed – Moore tells us this was fifteen years later). Here Hocquenghem wants to agree with Deleuze that desire is multiple and so that "desire is no more homosexual than heterosexual" in what is yet another anti-identitarian argument. Desire, in fact, "knows no name" and I find it hard to see how we can argue with that even in a world where all many people want to do is precisely "give it a name". The argument of Hocquenghem here, as with Deleuze, leads in a fragmentary, rhizomatic, unnameable direction where there is simply the desire that refuses to be pinned down to definitive names. This is an anti-sexuality, anti-"orientation", anti-gender argument, or at least the possible foundations of one. "Every day a thousand kinds of homosexual behaviour challenge the classifications imposed on them" claims Hocquenghem in *Homosexual Desire* and, I am bound to ask as a consequence, doesn't he have a point? Aren't the classifications, all of them, fictional, arbitrary and wholly unstable, ultimately indefinable and uncontainable in and by words? Consequently, should we agree with Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* that "sexuality brings into play... n sexes... which are so many uncontrollable becomings"? Desire is desire but it doesn't have a name, just as many possible forms and expressions as it can take. Eventually, we reach the Deleuzian conclusion which was a quote I actually used in a previous book: "It is no longer about being a man or a woman, but inventing sexes." What we then actually have here on this Deleuzian view is the invention of a multiplicity:

"*all sorts of possible new relations, micrological or micropsychic, essentially reversible, transversal relations, with as many sexes as there are assemblages, not even excluding [most shockingly of all?] new relations between men and women.*"

The task here, I then reflect, is not to reproduce more of a "the same" we attempt to set in stone as "reality" but to encourage the proliferation of millisexual desire, what Deleuze calls "entering into perverse 'relationship with the Outside'." Doing so, as Moore commentates, we neither fall prey to a capitalist logic of production nor a "heterogenital calculus of reproduction". Instead, we "become the Outside": we transform the social. Deleuze, in a way that appeals to the me who wrote both *Black Dog* and *Imagining / Queer / Anarchy*, both sexually infatuated books, and who would appeal to the Stephen Moore I also once knew who was always fascinated by bodies and their desires, seems, much like Charles Fourier, to see materiality as fundamentally erotic. In Deleuze's theory "desire is coextensive with the social" and so "sexuality is everywhere", no longer the sexual spectacle so much as the intimately, systemically and erotically mundane. Nature? So, as Moore then writes:

"*The 'everywhere' where desire, sex, and sexuality are active is one that precedes, exceeds, eludes, and elides the human. 'Everywhere there is libido as machine energy,' and to cordon off conceptually what humans do with humans sexually from what occurs between 'the red clover and the bumble bee, the wasp and the orchid' (Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, 323) is to misapprehend how that libidinal megamachine operates. Anthropocentric queer theory, we should conclude, is insufficiently queer, is too conserving of the human with its self-constituting, speciesist, subjugation of the nonhuman. Queer theory in the Deleuzoguattarian mode, meanwhile, spills over into ecotheory.*"

Where all this queer theory become ecotheory then engages Deleuze's theories about "virtuality" is that, effectively, "queerness and virtuality (which I understand, perhaps far too simplistically, as a version of my own idea that 'everything is a fiction') are but two names for a single project: counteractualization of the present." "The ossifying present"

in this formulation is the prison house from which we must yet escape and queer (and/or virtuality) is a path we must constantly take as our means to (possibly but never with certainty) escape it. In this struggle it is a queer, non-identifiable, millisexual desire which is our intellectual jewel of value to be protected at all costs. Desire is captured when it is named, so this logic goes, and so resisting such capture, exploding with, in and through diversity, must be our tactic:

"*Making love is not just becoming as one, or even two, but becoming as a hundred thousand . . . . Not . . . two sexes, but n sexes*" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*)

A third component of my inspirational rhizome is then my own previous writing, primarily that contained in the four books *Black Void, Black Flag, Black Dog* and *Imagining / Queer / Anarchy* (which total over 6000 pages, although some are repeated in multiple books). These books detail a form of anarchy, often also detailing its history and history of ideas as I trace and make the connections, and slowly become about "relationship" as the basis of a human understanding of that. In writing these books, which have led to this one and have taken just under ten years, I, much like Fourier and Deleuze and Guattari (and maybe even Stephen Moore), have come to understand physicality as an erotic and desiring "attractive" phenomenon – in my case within the context of an all-encompassing anarchy which is co-extensive with all that is. This reality is radically anti-authoritarian in nature in the sense that there are no gods and there are only the masters we tolerate (which we shouldn't). In one sense, then, our context is radical freedom and radical freedom to cooperative and promiscuous interaction – so it is radical freedom sited in a world where nothing is alone (even if it experiences loneliness) and everything entwines and transforms in myriad interdependent ways, the dependencies and interdependencies of this actuality constantly shifting and changing like participation in an eternal cosmic orgy.

“My interest here is in imagining a way to be different, to exist as a ‘free spirit’, to live a life with others that is not controlled” – or at least so I wrote in an essay from *Black Flag* titled “A Non-Theory of Anarchist Relationships in Civilization”. This essay discusses the individualist, free love ideas of Émile Armand, the anarchist communism of Peter Kropotkin and the historical speculations of Davids Graeber and Wengrow in their book *The Dawn of Everything* in compiling a non-theoretical argument for concentrating on “relationship” as the most important subject of our lives. Already in my first book, *Black Void*, I had in fact included pieces on “Rainbow Anarchism” (“the name I have given to my own understanding of anarchism, a political philosophy fundamentally opposed to government, coercion and violence” in which “the rainbow metaphor is meant to be an inclusive symbol which indicates that all kinds and orientations of people are welcome. I imagine an anarchism which includes those of different sexual orientation, gender, religious beliefs, colour, race and creed”) and “Prison or Freedom” (which was all about the relations between people and the contexts they create in a wider literary context which was significantly spiritual and thus about the larger questions of context, relationship and interaction). By the time I came to *Black Dog* (subtitle: *Jolly Roger’s Politics for Lovers and Fighters*) the social context of relationships was firmly established (the book had a first part concentrating on “sexual relationships” and a second part focusing on “political” ones) and the same was true in the case of *Imagining / Queer / Anarchy* where, in addition, metaphors of growth in an erotically-charged environment (which is surely never alone) and in nature in general were also in evidence.

But something else further stands out here: the need for imagination. That need is explicit in every book I have ever written. “A Non-Theory of Anarchist Relationships in Civilization” was, in fact, all about the repeated question “WHAT CAN YOU IMAGINE?” alongside the exampling of many differing ways to live. It mentioned variant

constructions of human kin and remarked on Graeber and Wengrow's assertion that, in hunter-gatherer settlements, most people are not biological relations. Who indeed is a relation, and of what kind, so this essay argued, is itself a fundamentally imaginative act rather than an imagined material one arbitrated by biological lineage. Organisation of relationships is then itself an imaginative task and this is entirely the point of *Imagining / Queer / Anarchy*, which is often about "alchemical anarchy", because it is about the transformation of human relationships in our material experience by means of imagining better, more self-liberating constructions. In the case of the argument of that book this is a matter of "green queer erotic love magic" in an argument which encompasses both the ecotheory and the "n sexes" eroticism of the Deleuzian vision that Stephen Moore discusses. In fact, the standard position stays remarkably similar throughout the thousands of pages I have written before. The basic position is that we are in a prison and forced to live under the conditions of forced (and so mostly static) prison relationships. What we then need to do is imagine ourselves out of this prison and its prison relationships and fashion entirely new (and inevitably diverse) ones for ourselves.

An explicitly erotic turn in the interpretation of that basic scenario was taken with the book *Black Dog* (not least under the mammoth influence of Christopher Ryan and Cacilda Jetha's anthropological book *Sex At Dawn* – about which I cannot speak highly enough) and continued on in *Imagining / Queer / Anarchy*. With the writing of this book I aim to sharpen up and further explore what was being said there, perhaps being even more explicit than I was in those previous tomes about the erotic, relational and queer themes. My thinking has always been organic and developmental – as would be seen by a brief chronological appraisal of the four books written before this one. Yet the seeds of what I am writing now were there ten years ago when I began – for example, in the writing of the anarchist Emma Goldman whose own sexual interest, libidinally and academically, was

great. As she was really the first “anarchist” who caught my attention, and I read everything I could find both about her and from her – leading to my pseudo-biographical appraisal of her in a chapter/book in *Black Flag* – it is perhaps inevitable that her interests left their imprint on me. These were fundamentally about raising the status and independence of women in society, a reappraisal of sexuality in society as a whole (including in relation to non-adults) and the relations, across the board, of human being to human being. All this might then be summed up under the rubric of “freedom in relationships”.

It was, for example, through the interest of Emma Goldman, Émile Armand and others of their time in so-called “free love” that I came to understand sexual liberty as an integral part of a much greater, political liberty. This would eventually set me to thinking, by the time of *Black Dog* (a title significantly related to Cynics with their own, naturalistic understanding of sex), that sexual practice (and so sexual relationship itself) could be the basis of an habitual political liberty or social organisation. In encouraging that idea, my finding of the book *Sex At Dawn*, both a bio-anthropological study of our species’ sexual history and a deconstructive attack on conservative myths of sexuality (particularly the coupling myth), was vital. It opened a door to me to lots of researches about other people in other times and places who did not live as modern, Western, authoritarian political and social conservatives would insist we live. If you want to talk about “what is natural” or argue that the nuclear family is such a thing well then simple education about how people have lived over millennia and sometimes still do live makes you immediately look a fool. The lives of Golden Age pirates, who I took as examples of self-organising anarchy in and through my literary researches, would here also be instructive for that (as I discuss at the end of part two of *Imagining / Queer / Anarchy*). Sexual liberty, in fact, a liberty of body and a liberty of bodily expression and gender performance, would all become clear and

obvious markers, by their presence or absence, of the political liberty existent in any given social formation. Not all sexual libertarians live in socially libertarian circumstances. But where there is no social liberty you can guarantee that sex and sexuality is being both suppressed and oppressed.

Thus, my focus became human relationship with a particular focus on sexuality and the systems of relations that human beings build both in and between themselves and with their natural environment. I, thus, find myself in total agreement with the Deleuze exegeted by Stephen Moore who considers that the analysis that only takes account of the human is an analysis that has only taken account of a part of the whole to be considered and discussed. Recently, I became more ecological in my arguments than I ever had before (in truth, at the beginning I was barely interested in ecology at all and that is perhaps one of my biggest changes over ten years) but in this book I shall have to redouble my efforts in that area once again. No account of the human can simply be an account of the human for without ecology, without a natural world of relations, without a wild, there is no human. The world's fate is our fate. How we organise ourselves in/and the world contributes to that fate. We breathe its air, drink its water and eat its fruits. We are permanently related to, and reliant upon, it. All the more reason, then, to analyse and discuss the systematic ways human beings interact with this world as part of human organisation and self-organisation. Significantly, I have begun to see this natural world as erotic (and self-organisingly erotic) too (both in pseudo-academic ways but also poetically and in terms of visions or dreams I have had – a Dionysian dream of being covered in vaginas all over my body particularly stands out!) and so, in this book, that results in my wanting to explore this further and, in fact, to broach the subject of SEXUAL AUTONOMY as a fundamental aspect of any genuine anarchy (a place, a polity, a world, a cosmos, without leaders). In this respect, the argument is that in places where sex and sexual

expression is more free then the consequent and abiding social and political arrangements will consequently be more free, more conducive to liberty, as well.

The world we currently live in evinces many problems of human relationship and, to say the least, its handling of sex and sexuality is anything from exploitative to negligent to chaotic to simply authoritarian and prohibitive. In the very week I write this and begin this project I have read news stories about teen boys bombarded by social media with misogynistic content and context which turns them into those looking for girls and young women to exploit and victimise online and, simultaneously, a tidal wave of commercial sex pitched as the constant and expected sexual availability of women. In the same social and political situation, next to no sexual education goes on that I can see – except that given by shady misogynists in dark web forums online who seem obsessed with "alpha males" and the imagined "feminisation" of culture. Due to the large American cultural influence over the West, it is clear to see that under the likes of Trump and Musk and a conservative American administration, a new patriarchalisation attempt is underway as forever conservatives who never go away attempt, yet again, to roll the clock back to the verities of former times when women, queers and other deviations from male-dominated, heterosexual patriarchy were either completely hidden or completely put in their place (which is always one others assign them).

My argument here is that this is a war for freedom and that it is a social war, a war for kinds of relationship or social organisation. In that, the final aspect of my inspirational rhizome initiating this project to consider is my affinity for Cynicism. A particular metaphor of use here that comes from that is: CHANGE THE CURRENCY. The story goes that Diogenes, a cosmopolitan who claimed allegiance to no land or city but to "the world", adulterated the currency of his homeland, making it worthless, and causing him to

be cast out. Later scholars and others have taken this story and used it as a metaphor both for Diogenes himself and for Cynics of his ilk more widely: Cynics are those who “change the currency” of politics and culture. This is what I, a modern day Cynic who sees in themselves lineage from Diogenes the Dog, have been doing throughout my writing and intend to do again here now. In what follows I intend to imagine pointers to a new culture and a new politics, to reimagine human relationships entirely as an erotic anarchy. Currently I have no idea how that will turn out although I can see and try to interpret the footprints that have led me here. But you can be assured I am very aware that we have to change the currency if it is not already too late – for we can no longer afford the one we have.

2. What is Nature? Nature As A Value

In my first introduction I remarked that the Cynics were those who wanted to live "according to nature". It is a reasonable question to ask in that context what "nature" in that sense then was for them. But one does not necessarily get very far doing so for the general remark about this that we find in the literature is that Cynics were those who preferred "nature" over "custom" or "law" – and this latter item is then generally glossed or explained as "civilisation". Thus, we may at least deduce that, for the Cynic, "nature" was neither "law" nor "custom" nor "civilisation" – things invented by human beings for human purposes. Cynics were then those who preferred to live in the manner of nature as opposed to the manner of civilisation where nature has a character (better: an ethic) all of its own to which the character (or ethic) of civilisation, in the Cynic mind at least, stands opposed. If you ask what this nature consists in or of I think you get an anarchist wish list – agency, autonomy, free association, decentralisation, self-organisation – which makes the anarchist and the Cynic naturalist natural allies.

Some further things I discussed in my first intro might expand upon this. The Deleuzean, and Deleuzoguattarian, preference for "n sexes", as expertly explained and extrapolated by Stephen Moore, lines up with a more biological description of sexual reproduction in nature as a matter of diversity production. (See Bruce Bagemihl's *Biological Exuberance* or Joan Roughgarden's *Evolution's Rainbow* for more on that.) Any organism that reproduces sexually (and far from all do) automatically builds diversity into its species by doing so (where asexual reproduction simply clones the same thing). This builds longevity and resistance factors into said species as a result due directly to the differences sexual reproduction relies on and creates. This consequently contributes to making "nature" a more diverse phenomenon as a self-organising thing (for no one is telling nature, or

anything in it, to sexually reproduce as opposed to any other course of action). This sexual reproduction may itself build upon observations that nature, as a living phenomenon, is "attractive", "erotic" or "sexual" as a phenomenon in itself. Life, in general, seems a collaborative, cooperative, social, interactive and co-entailing business. (All life on earth, we may say, is cohabiting or, as Donna Haraway puts it in her *Companion Species Manifesto*, is "becoming together" rather than just becoming in splendid isolation.) This inevitably seems to involve intimacy, connection and sharing as a consequence. It may even involve attachments – either temporary or more permanent – which become integral to the survival of forms of life in themselves. Nature gives several examples of such co-dependencies. In realising all this, however, we must simultaneously realise that the category of "nature" explodes our thinking necessarily beyond "the human" and, indeed, contextualises the human within nature itself. It is illegitimate to think of humans as set apart from a thing without which they would simply not exist and because of which they are themselves a co-dependent phenomenon. If we are categorising things then humans are a sub-category of nature, no more and no less, and totally encompassed by it.

My task in this second introduction, however, is to make a stand for some form of description of nature (as a value) from which I can later discuss other things. This is not an easy thing to do for "nature" is itself something of an abstract, and even apophatic, concept rather than a knowing, self-aware reality. It might even be Schroedinger's nature – in that it is simultaneously there and yet not there, imaginary and actuality. The way I come to approach it, then, is by talking about "manner of operation" and asking what characterises "nature" in this respect. I start with Daoist reflections and with Daoism acknowledged as some kind of naturalistic religion. Here an obvious and immediate point to note, coming from the opening chapter, and, indeed, the opening lines, of the

Daodejing itself, is that "the way" that Daoism purports to talk about is not subject to human domestication in words:

"*The way that can be spoken of is not the constant way; The name that can be named is not the constant name.*"

Indeed, if we move to *Daodejing* 25 we read the following:

"*Something mysteriously formed, born before heaven and earth. In the silence and the void, standing alone and unchanging. Ever present and in motion, perhaps it is the mother of the Ten Thousand Things. I do not know its name, call it Dao. For lack of a better word, call it great. Being great, it flows. It flows far away. Having gone far, it returns. Therefore, 'Dao is great; heaven is great; earth is great; the king is also great.' These are the four great powers of the universe, and the king is one of them. Humanity follows the earth, earth follows heaven, heaven follows the Dao. Dao follows what is natural.*"

The word used there for "natural" is the very important word for an understanding of Daoism (and its concept of nature) that is "ziran". Of "ziran" the leading scholar of Daoism, Isabelle Robinet, says the following under the entry for "ziran" in the two volume *Encyclopedia of Taoism* edited by Fabrizio Pregadio:

"*ziran 自然*

'so of its own'; spontaneous, spontaneity

As an adjective, the term ziran means 'spontaneous,' 'natural,' 'so of its own,' 'so of itself.' As a noun, it denotes spontaneity, naturalness, the things as they are. It is a synonym of

zizai (self-existent) and ziyou (self-produced), and is very close in meaning to zide (self-attaining) and ziwei (working by itself, doing spontaneously).

Ziran implies a free working; it is the positive side of the Dao, whose negative side is wu (no-thing). On the one hand, wu is the indeterminate and unknowable Dao, which is lost if it is given a name or an attribute: it is the Origin of life as it cannot be grasped and has no beginning. On the other hand, ziran is the Dao as producing life, its de (virtue), and is sometimes equated with the Original Pneuma (yuanqi). In this sense, ziran is like the water of a spring that never ceases to flow anew, and is a synonym of Origin (yuan) and Chaos (hundun). It is the permanence of the Dao and its de, the rule of Heaven and Earth that has no beginning and penetrates to the utmost of existence beyond the Void. Hence ziran, as a quality ascribed to something, means 'true' and 'primal,' and denotes transcendence.

On the cosmological level, ziran defines the way the world goes on by itself without anyone 'doing' it, and expresses the faith in a world well-ordered and self-regulated in a natural way. Epistemologically, it means that we do not know what is producing life or how life is achieved. Ziran is then the ultimate word, not in the sense of an explication but as an expression of human ignorance and respect of the secret of life. As Daodejing 25 says, 'The Dao models itself on ziran,' which means that it 'models itself on what is so of its own,' which is a tautology. Ziran can therefore also be an expression of agnosticism... Under Buddhist influence, ziran also took on the meaning of 'non-substantial,' 'fundamentally having no nature of its own,' as opposed to what has cause and effect. In this sense, it is a synonym of 'real emptiness'... [apophatic]

In human beings, ziran means being free from dependence on some other thing or substance (wudai 無待, as the Zhuangzi says), being natural (tian 天, the contrary of 'made

by man" or wei 僞, which is the artificial in Zhuangzi's terms), and being creative. It means that each being has its own spring of life within itself. So to be ziran is to be natural in the highest sense, to nourish within oneself one's own nature that is one's own profound and true sprout of life.

To respect ziran one should not interfere (wuwei – [the Daoist concept of "actionless action"]), and gently let life act and speak through oneself rather than acting and speaking individually. In that sense, ziran is the principle of handling affairs that guides the saint (shengren) or the sage king who respects the workings of the Dao in the world and in human affairs. To act spontaneously is to have no intention of one's own, to let the natural force that is within everything work freely. This is not the same as giving free rein to one's own fantasy (as the term has been misunderstood by some... thinkers), because this fantasy is only superficial desire to satisfy one's immediate wishes, and not the profound naturalness without desires that is ziran."

There is much to take in from this – and in such a way as we can begin to talk about a ziranarchy of nature (nature as natural spontaneity that is so of its own):

a) Ziran indicates something being achieved by and from itself. It is not directed, coerced or implicated in a necessity by something else. It is something that is a consequence of what it is. "Spontaneity" here indicates self-organisation and so is immediately compatible with my biologically understood concept of anarchy as precisely self-organisation. When the Laozi says that "Dao follows what is ziran" it is saying that the way is self-organising rather than something that is forced or told what to do – inasmuch as it follows ziran.

b) Ziran is “life-producing”, the power (virtue) of the Dao, an unfathomable origin and source of positive energies. It is originality, creativity, generativity, (diversity).

c) Ziran, “spontaneity”, “naturalness”, is how, on the cosmological level, anything is imagined to happen at all. This is particularly interesting when understood as “self-organisation”. Nature, in this understanding, is not being “done” – it is “doing itself”. This leads to a chaos that is order that is chaos – in other words, something where these words as opposites now make no sense or require each other much as yin requires yang and vice versa. Nature becomes tautologous, a transformative quality, characteristic, ethic or manner of being (something participatory made of self-organising relations) rather than a substance.

d) In regard to human beings, ziran bears some resemblance to the Cynic attitude. It is a creative self-sufficiency – at least in terms of abilities and practicalities. It is precisely that impetus to self-organisation any life that comes to exist actually needs in order to carry on doing so – “to nourish within oneself one’s own nature”.

e) Notably, ziran (spontaneity, naturalness) should be left alone and left to itself to simply operate. It is never something to be harnessed or domesticated. Things should be guided by ziran or act by simply letting it flow into, and through, events.

f) Ziran is not primarily about desires or intentions. It is “so of its own” – being what it is.

Taking these Daoist-inspired ideas onboard, I move now to consider German forestry expert and ecologist Peter Wohlleben’s many reflections on trees – primarily in his book *The Hidden Life of Trees*. Trees, it seems to me, are the kinds of things you think of when

you imagine “nature” so perhaps considering them will tell us something about it? I cannot cover everything Wohlleben says here – which is considerable – but I can hope to make some salient points from his book which I hope will be suggestive.

Wohlleben begins by talking about a tree stump he came across which, to his amazement, was being kept alive by its neighbours. Trees, in most cases, are social life forms. The chapter this story is in is actually called “friendships” which is even more suggestive. In fact it appears that trees are often likely to join their root systems to those of other trees (in an example of mutual aid) but also to vast mycelial networks present in the soil (which are, of course, composed of forms of life that are completely different in species to the tree). “Friendships” indeed (or, at the very least, alliances). As a consequence:

“*Scientists in the Harz mountains in Germany have discovered that this really is a case of interdependence, and most individual trees of the same species growing in the same stand are connected to each other through their root systems. It appears that nutrient exchange and helping neighbors in times of need is the rule, and this leads to the conclusion that forests are superorganisms with interconnections much like ant colonies.*”

This, we may consider, makes absolute sense. A tree, much like anything else, has a much better chance of thriving and surviving if it has aid. This doesn’t stop anything being a loner (and Wohlleben reports some trees can be) but that would be an unusual strategy. Social networking simply makes sense for very many forms of life (from bacteria upwards) and social interactions are normal and regularly beneficial throughout the natural world. In regard to trees, as Wohlleben points out:

"*A tree is not a forest. On its own, a tree cannot establish a consistent local climate. It is at the mercy of wind and weather. But together, many trees create an ecosystem that moderates extremes of heat and cold, stores a great deal of water, and generates a great deal of humidity. And in this protected environment, trees can live to be very old. To get to this point, the community must remain intact no matter what. If every tree were looking out only for itself, then quite a few of them would never reach old age. Regular fatalities would result in many large gaps in the tree canopy, which would make it easier for storms to get inside the forest and uproot more trees. The heat of summer would reach the forest floor and dry it out. Every tree would suffer.*"

These are good, solid reasons for cooperation amongst trees and we may consider that, as material forms of life, they must have imperatives and impetuses that are driving them forwards, willing them to carry on living. Indeed, as I have remarked elsewhere before, it makes no sense that anything at all would have life without life itself having the character or quality or ability of wanting and willing and being able to propagate itself. Life must, to some extent, be self-maintaining and self-organising. This is as true for a tree as for anything else. Consequently:

"*Tree roots extend a long way, more than twice the spread of the crown. So the root systems of neighboring trees inevitably intersect and grow into one another—though there are always some exceptions. Even in a forest, there are loners, would-be hermits who want little to do with others. Can such antisocial trees block alarm calls simply by not participating? Luckily, they can't. For usually there are fungi present that act as intermediaries to guarantee quick dissemination of news. These fungi operate like fiber-optic Internet cables. Their thin filaments penetrate the ground, weaving through it in almost unbelievable density. One teaspoon of forest soil contains many miles of these*

'hyphae.' Over centuries, a single fungus can cover many square miles and network an entire forest. The fungal connections transmit signals from one tree to the next, helping the trees exchange news about insects, drought, and other dangers."

This quotation suggests other things. Social interaction implies communication and obvious things to communicate are your own needs (water, nutrition) but also dangers from pests, viruses or the wider environment. It may come as a surprise to some that trees (and even plant life more generally) can communicate. But why should it? If things survive better together than alone then it makes perfect sense that they would find ways to share messages in order to do so. Why do you think humans can talk? Its the same reason plants and life more generally can too, each in their own ways. Its all part of that survival instinct seemingly implicated in the very idea of life itself. There is no point being born or coming to life if, as a living thing, you have no desire or ability to continue that life the moment after. Life implies some form or means of self-organising ability to do so. In the forest it appears that things simply connect up and start talking to each other to enable the ability to create a local habitat where they may all continue to thrive on the basis of mutual aid. If they didn't do that, they would get picked off by weather, by pests, by diseases, by lack of resources they couldn't reach by themselves, one by one until nothing was left. "Nature", then, is active in its own production and maintenance.

But nature, in the life of trees at least, is not only about cooperation and communication:

"*If trees are weakened, it could be that they lose their conversational skills along with their ability to defend themselves. Otherwise, it's difficult to explain why insect pests specifically seek out trees whose health is already compromised. It's conceivable that to do this, insects listen to trees' urgent chemical warnings and then test trees that don't pass the message on*

by taking a bite out of their leaves or bark. A tree's silence could be because of a serious illness or, perhaps, the loss of its fungal network, which would leave the tree completely cut off from the latest news. The tree no longer registers approaching disaster, and the doors are open for the caterpillar and beetle buffet. The loners I just mentioned are similarly susceptible—they might look healthy, but they have no idea what is going on around them."

Not only trees are alive in the forest – things that want what trees have got (considerable energy reserves locked up in the sugars they create through photosynthesis as well as lots of water) are alive too and whilst plants can create their own food sources animals cannot. Animals, whether birds or beetles or worms, must feed on other life. And so life and death go hand in hand throughout nature as forms of life seek to get the better of each other in a constant dance back and forth. No wonder, then, that trees buddy up in order to make the warning network all that more efficient and forward thinking. If you are alive there are any number of things that could make you not alive so watching out for them, with the help of friends, is only prudent. The anarchist Peter Kropotkin reported on things like this amongst animals and people well over a century ago in his rightly famous book *Mutual Aid*. He did not so much report it of plants but then his focus was not upon them. There is no reason, however, why plants, which are equally forms of life, would be any different though. Life is life and one point of any life would seem to be to survive as what you are for as long as you can. Consequently, this implies some strategy:

"*Students at the Institute for Environmental Research at RWTH Aachen discovered something amazing about photosynthesis in undisturbed beech forests. Apparently, the trees synchronize their performance so that they are all equally successful. And that is not what one would expect. Each beech tree grows in a unique location, and conditions can vary greatly in just a few yards. The soil can be stony or loose. It can retain a great deal of water*

or almost no water. It can be full of nutrients or extremely barren. Accordingly, each tree experiences different growing conditions; therefore, each tree grows more quickly or more slowly and produces more or less sugar or wood, and thus you would expect every tree to be photosynthesizing at a different rate.

And that's what makes the research results so astounding. The rate of photosynthesis is the same for all the trees. The trees, it seems, are equalizing differences between the strong and the weak. Whether they are thick or thin, all members of the same species are using light to produce the same amount of sugar per leaf. This equalization is taking place underground through the roots. There's obviously a lively exchange going on down there. Whoever has an abundance of sugar hands some over; whoever is running short gets help. Once again, fungi are involved. Their enormous networks act as gigantic redistribution mechanisms. It's a bit like the way social security systems operate to ensure individual members of society don't fall too far behind."

This is quite remarkable. Every tree in a forest is obviously in a slightly different situation. It has slightly different access to water or sunlight and a slightly different environmental location which may or may not bring it into contact with things that may do it harm. In such a situation that each tree is just as capable of defending itself (and talking to others) as every other tree is not just important but vital for the health (and continued existence) of the forest as a whole. So what is being shown here is not merely a selfish desire as each tree looks after itself but a collective mentality which exists for the good of all. In a situation in which trees simply start "looking after number one" they actually sign their own death warrants because the death of everything that could cooperate with them is their own eventual death too. Every tree that gets into difficulties is one less tree that can be of help in creating a habitat in which they can all thrive. And so you get these naturally

occurring networks of cooperations amongst varying organisms. All for one and one for all. “A tree can only be as strong as the forest that surrounds it.”

However, it is not all sweetness and light in the forest and we should not imagine that the nature that births trees is just about cooperation and mutual aid. Each tree also wants to exist for itself and in itself and as itself. (We may speculate here that without “selfishness” in this regard then “cooperation” would also not be possible – “cooperation” being something necessarily consented to or volunteered by beings with some sort of “ego” or self-interest.) It consequently engages in fights and arguments over the things it needs to grow – especially if it happens to be with a different sort of tree. (In *Mutual Aid* Kropotkin highlighted that cooperation was primarily amongst creatures of the same species and that it was this sort of cooperation that was truly beneficial and Wohlleben seems to carry that argument on in relation to trees as well.) As a result:

“*Trees are very social beings, and they help each other out. But that is not sufficient for successful survival in the forest ecosystem. Every species of tree tries to procure more space for itself, to optimize its performance, and, in this way, to crowd out other species. After the fight for light, it is the fight for water that finally decides who wins. Tree roots are very good at tapping into damp ground and growing fine hairs to increase their surface area so that they can suck up as much water as possible. Under normal circumstances, that is sufficient, but more is always better. And that is why, for millions of years, trees have paired up with fungi.*”

What we might say about this is that, of course, trees are not being knowingly collective in their activities (as we would humanise it). Indeed, I think its probably the opposite: they are acting for themselves first. They pair up, from themselves, with fungi (and other

trees), first of all, to ensure their own survival. But what emerges from all this “selfish” behaviour, when cooperation or interactivity comes into play, is a collective ability that could not have existed prior to it. So it is not “selfishness or collectivity” but “selfishness creating the possibility for collectivity”. Thus:

“*With the help of mycelium of an appropriate species for each tree—for instance, the oak milkcap and the oak—a tree can greatly increase its functional root surface so that it can suck up considerably more water and nutrients. You find twice the amount of life-giving nitrogen and phosphorus in plants that cooperate with fungal partners than in plants that tap the soil with their roots alone.*”

The tree could tell the fungi to get stuffed if it wanted to be selfish and isolationist but, instead, it can choose to use its self-interest to genuinely help itself but also to engage in a networked situation that also helps others. This is something nature appears to favour quite a lot – and not in spite of an egoistic self-interest but precisely because of it. The issue is then not one of self-interest or no self-interest but of how self-interest shall be actuated and what its consequences shall be. “Selfishness” does not have to mean isolationism and always “going it alone”. If it did, its probable this planet would be almost entirely barren. Or, to put it another way, nature is attractive. In terms of trees, the logic here then seems to be that whilst a tree has potential cooperative associates then it has less to worry about than it otherwise might. And to put this yet another way:

“*Among trees, each species fights other species. Let’s assume the beeches native to Central Europe could emerge victorious in most forests there. Would this really be an advantage? What would happen if a new pathogen came along that infected most of the beeches and killed them? In that case, wouldn’t it be more advantageous if there were a certain number*

of other species around—oaks, maples, ashes, or firs—that would continue to grow and provide the shade needed for a new generation of young beeches to sprout and grow up? Diversity provides security for ancient forests. Because fungi are also very dependent on stable conditions, they support other species underground and protect them from complete collapse to ensure that one species of tree doesn't manage to dominate."

Welcome to the world of nature – where even enemies can be friends – in which DIVERSITY helps everything. Or, to put even that another way: in a world of pure competition (the libertarian exploiter's masturbation fantasy) EVERYTHING WOULD BE DEAD. Whether you like it or not, there is no life without cooperation and diversity of life.

Its about more than even "selfishness", "alliances" and diversity in the forest, however. Its about creating a habitat, about creating local material conditions amenable to the best life possible for the living things within it. Just as beavers slow down rivers and create pools more conducive to their lodges, so trees also create local habitats that serve them best. As Wohlleben then remarks: "the forest creates its own ideal habitat". This is about preserving the things the trees need to survive. For example, deciduous trees need a cool, damp forest floor. Hence you get a densely packed canopy that blocks out sunlight which might dry the ground out. But, by the same token, in times of rain downpours, the same deciduous trees with their spread out canopies are built to funnel the water they catch to their roots, or the soil surrounding them, so they can take advantage of a good swig of free sustenance. But, yet again, trees do even more than this for Wohlleben points out that trees play a significant role in climate and particularly in cloud formation. And you know what comes from clouds. Living things, things imbued with "life", act to sustain themselves and this is at least partly by creating the conditions in which they can be sustained. This is not the same for every tree or plant (which are diverse for very good

reasons anyway) any more than it is for every animal. But each does what it is for largely similar reasons since all are examples of the same phenomenon: life.

In this regard, trees and water seem to have an interesting relationship in the wider context of exactly "nature":

"*The importance of trees for streams continues even after death. When a dead beech falls across a streambed, it lies there for decades. It acts like a small dam and creates tiny pockets of calm water where species that can't tolerate strong currents can hang out. The nondescript larvae of the fire salamander are just such creatures. They look like small newts, except they have feathery gills. They are finely stippled with dark markings and have a yellow spot where their legs meet their bodies. In the cold water of the forest, they lie in wait for the tiny crawfish they love to eat. These little guys need crystal-clear water, and the dead trees look after this as well. Mud and floating debris drop to the bottom of the tiny dammed pools, and because stream flows are so low, it gives bacteria more time to break down harmful substances. And don't worry about that foam that sometimes forms in these pools after heavy rains. What looks like an environmental disaster is, in fact, the result of humic acids that tiny waterfalls have mixed with air until they turn into froth. These acids come from the decomposition of leaves and dead wood and are extremely beneficial for the ecosystem*."

We are now into thinking about nature as a random concatenation of events-in-relationship that constitute making it what it is, the activity or action of nature. In this trees, like anything else, play their innocent, unknowing part – but "nature" itself always remains apophatically beyond them. As a result:

"*The forest ecosystem is held in a delicate balance. Every being has its niche and its function, which contribute to the well-being of all. Nature is often described like that, or something along those lines; however, that is, unfortunately, false. For out there under the trees, the law of the jungle rules. Every species wants to survive, and each takes from the others what it needs. All are basically ruthless, and the only reason everything doesn't collapse is because there are safeguards against those who demand more than their due. And one final limitation is an organism's own genetics: an organism that is too greedy and takes too much without giving anything in return destroys what it needs for life and dies out. Most species, therefore, have developed innate behaviors that protect the forest from overexploitation.*"

Important here then seems to be exactly that "everything is out for itself" (ego or selfishness) but also that this is never the whole story (nor the point of the story) and that it often results in actually very unselfish ecosystems based on "friendships", alliances and mutual cooperations which are absolutely necessary to the survival of entire species or populations. More basically here we can see that nature, taking this as an example, is a matter of activity carried out in order to propagate life. (If nothing happened then there would be no life and so no nature to speak of since nature is not often regarded as simply a featureless void.) Yet if we are agreeing that nature is, at a very basic level, simply "activity" (and the consequent results of that activity) then it follows that it is the character of this nature-enabling activity which is to be explored. As to the character of this activity, I consequently have some suggestions. I would argue that:

1. It tends towards diversity of life.
2. It is self-organising/actualising.
3. It seeks connection/interaction/cooperation.

4. It requires (i.e. results in) change and becomes a process of continual transformation.

BUT:

5. This is not a knowing process.

6. It is not teleological.

7. There is no purpose or intention.

8. Things simply do (and are left to do) what they are which, when becoming interactive, connective and relational, leads to more complex results and outcomes resulting in what we think of as “nature”. (Nature is what it does – it is the events-in-relationship.)

Taking a walk through some actual woods, which is something I do every day as it promotes my own mental health, it occurred to me that at least all of the first four things just mentioned (if not simply all of them) are, in their own way, "anti-political" in human terms – if by "political" we mean the political orthodoxy of the West. Such "politics", for example, frowns on diversity from China to Russia to Palestine to Western Europe to many parts of Africa to America (where, in the last of these, Trump is [as I write this in mid-2025] busy defunding anything at all that even has the word “diversity” in its name or description – which probably includes several books about biodiversity!). Such politics absolutely wishes to stamp out self-organisation/actualisation because the liberal sovereign nation state is the modern secular imaginary of a god. Its rule is absolute and may not be challenged under any circumstances. Consequently, such politics wants to strictly control who may connect with who (and uses force to express its will on this – for example, via immigration policy). Such politics, which is often basically and fundamentally conservative of a status quo based on a centralising power and the static relations it enshrines, hates change and seeks to retard it.

But if the activity we are describing in the eight points above is the activity of nature and is illustrative of its character and tendencies then what we are saying is that human politics, in its coerced deliberation and purposive intention, is actually fighting against a self-characterising order of life, a self-characterising order whose primary reason for existence might seem to be precisely the creation and maintenance of a complex and ever evolving web of life. This is, in fact, what Daoist texts such as those I implicated above do say for both the Daodejing and the Zhuangzi have passages along the lines of "the best way to rule is to leave things alone" with the implicit understanding in such passages that a peaceful biological and natural order cannot be made but is an emergent property of leaving nature to itself (nature itself being imagined as a way of natural spontaneity created through unself-conscious action). Have these Daoist texts recognised something modern authoritarians and their sycophants have not? I think they may well have. But, in doing so, they may also have exposed a biopolitics and a bioethics – where these things are names for how nature itself is arranged (by itself) and progresses when left to itself (i.e. as a concatenation of interacting entities-in-relation).

We can get a different, yet complementary, angle on this by spending some time in the swamps of Louisiana (and other green places) in the company of Alan Moore's second iteration of the comic book character Swamp Thing where Moore has some very specific things to say about "the green" from his fictional perspective. Moore, as his readers will be aware, is more often than not an extremely politically and ethically engaged writer in general terms and this is also the case during his run as the primary writer of the *Swamp Thing* comic from 1984-1987. Moore's first act as writer of this title, in fact, was to kill off Swamp Thing (who, previous to Moore, had imagined himself a man become plant – a plant man) and to reinvent him as "the green", a "plant elemental", with a consciousness of its own (borrowed from a previously human host – Alec Holland – in one of those

terribly common inexplicable accidents by which superheroes and others are often created in comic books). Thus, Swamp Thing in Moore's hands can become the life-desiring and creating positivity of nature as a character in its own right and be contrasted with "the red" (humanity, often characterised by aggression and violence) or "the black" (disease and putrefaction). Moore, who is telling a tale of and for humans, of course, can then explicitly have humans (not to mention all kinds of weird and wonderful mythological beings and even aliens) interact with this characterised as a being and give ethical and political lessons through his fictions.

These lessons might, in fact, begin with Moore's original reconstitution of the character for Swamp Thing is certainly a being with its own nature and will (and form of being). Consequently, it is not a thing to be exploited or destroyed any more than anything else is. Life is life, created equal in its diversity and difference and form, and nothing necessarily has call on, or right over, anything else. Having life, you have equal opportunity to the development of that life. That life is also in the context of all the other life, something which is equally itself and in the same situation of having life and the opportunity to develop it. This is relevant in the context of *Swamp Thing* because when Moore begins his run the titular character is under attack and gets killed by a shady corporation who wishes to exploit him. Unfortunately, neither they, nor we until Moore's second issue (#21), realise that Swamp Thing, when grown, is actually a tangled mass of plant matter and so acts biologically like a plant and not like a man. Consequently, although they have attempted to kill him as a man, with bullets and incendiaries, he regrows as a plant would. There is a lesson in this too: plants are not animals and life has, and takes, many forms, none of which are more or less legitimate than any other. This works in every way you can imagine too, by the way, as we find out in one of Moore's early story arcs where the character Jason Woodrue, the Floronic Man (who makes the

discovery of Swamp Thing's new nature), attempts to seize control of the plant world in order to destroy the animal world. In doing this (and with plant problems and affiliations of his own), he thinks he is doing plants a favour but he has forgotten that without the carbon dioxide animals generate by their existence then plants would not be able to function as they do. So immediately Moore is making the argument that the natural world hangs together as one. Each existence, individual as it may seem to be, is actually also always a co-existence and a cascading set of interactive co-dependencies. (How would your life be without all that free oxygen plants produce?)

A major point of Moore's run on Swamp Thing for my purposes is then that "the way of the wilderness" or "the way of the wood" (the latter pertinent in relation to the key issue #47 – "The Parliament of Trees") is not the way of human beings. This is shown, first, in that two issue arc where The Floronic Man, Jason Woodrue, hijacks the plant world through a still unconscious Swamp Thing and uses it to purge the world of its "meat" inhabitants. The subject matter here is how Woodrue's rage and anger infects the plant world and subverts it for his own purposes. Meanwhile, in the aforementioned issue #47, Swamp Thing travels to the Amazon and meets with his older forebears and precursors as an earth elemental. But he learns that, although their origin stories are seemingly very similar, their mentality is not. So when Swamp Thing, who is coming to them for advice about how to utilise his "power" to solve his, and the world's, problems, addresses them, he is very much knocked back by the response he receives, a response he will not actually come to understand until issue #64 which was Moore's final issue on the comic. In brief, this conversation goes as follows:

Swamp Thing: Eternal trees, please forgive my intrusion. I came seeking knowledge. A great danger threatening. I must know how to use my power to its best advantage.

The Parliament: Power? Power is not the thing. To be calm within oneself, that is the way of the wood. Power tempts anger, and anger is like wildfire. Avoid it.

We sense disturbance and uncertainty in you. Why so?

Swamp Thing: I... I do not know. I have travelled this country and seen much that is evil. It preys upon my mind. I wonder if nature can be just to allow such things.

The Parliament: Flesh doubts, wood knows. If you wish to understand evil, you must understand the bark, the roots, the worms of the earth. That is the wisdom of an erl-king. Aphid eats leaf. Ladybug eats aphid. Soil absorbs dead ladybug. Plant feeds upon soil. Is aphid evil? Is ladybug evil? Is soil evil? Where is the evil in all the wood?... The Parliament has spoken. You had best leave now.

Swamp Thing: But it was so brief. I was not given a direct answer.

The Parliament: You were told to avoid power, to avoid anger... perhaps you were not listening as wood should listen?

Indeed, perhaps Swamp Thing was not listening for he had pointed out a similar thing to Woodrue in his conflict with The Floronic Man over 20 issues earlier – and this was when Swamp Thing had even less of a clue about who or what he was than he does in this case. Moore here typifies “the way of the wood” as passive, indifferent, non-interventionist, a thing which minds its business, keeps its counsel and does not set out to interfere in the wider issues of the world, seeking to control or impose upon them. (Compare my previous Daoist thoughts.) “The wood” can also supply a logic for this. This is important in terms of

Moore's arc on the Swamp Thing comic which can be characterised as his turning of the titular character from a man into a plant. Consequently, Swamp Thing himself must cease acting and thinking like Alec Holland and fully become the plant elemental he really is. That includes stopping acting and thinking like "the red" and becoming "the green". Moore gives us the logic and the stance of "the green" here – but Swamp Thing cannot understand it. It is, as yet, still too alien to him (in a story, as told by Moore, where "Man" can be seen from time to time as nature's alienation from itself – most obviously in the two issue "Nukeface Papers" story [#35-#36] which is all about the effects of pollution and the dumping of toxic waste – which kills Swamp Thing for the second of three times in Moore's run on the comic). Swamp Thing will, in a subsequent story, thus go on to become angry when Abby Cable, his lover, is captured by the authorities, utilise the power of nature at his command, and seemingly get killed as a result, the result of his "meat" wisdom (anger and intervention) as opposed to tree wisdom (calm indifference and non-intervention). It will only be in Moore's final issue, when Swamp Thing (resurrected and reborn for a third time in Moore's run and now wanting to settle in the swamp with Abby) will realise that nature doesn't intervene and that this is, on the whole, the better course of action. As Moore writes this as a post-coital monologue given to Swamp Thing:

"*It is a human thing to affirm life so fiercely and so physically, surrendering the body to some ancient and vestigial pelvic brain and, having done this, to allow all such vitality to cease, to strike a contrast between those red, carnal moments and the blue, enduring coma-hours. It is a human thing. But I am not (human). And while she sleeps, I lie awake.*

Though flesh must rest, such animal requirements are behind me now, my only human urges those that I have chosen to retain. The rest were burned with Alec Holland on the night he died, the night his cosy, reassuring world erupted, blossomed into an enormous rose of

purging fire. And he went down into the swamp, falling away beneath its surface, burning still, a half-spent naval flare that blazed like life itself, sputtered, and finally went out. The swamp devoured him, through a thousand mouths of russet green, reduced him to a carcass, algae-spattered, pitiful, picked clean. Yet from those wretched leftovers there came a woodland god such as there had at other times on countless previous occasions with events similarly contrived, ending with roasted men at rest upon a river bed.

When with the Parliament of Trees… I glimpsed within their minds a dynasty spanning the eons, reaching back to times before mankind whose only record now is etched on sheets of coal, far underground… A dynasty of gods. Yet gods who've chosen never to exert their power, content to sit and stare into the shimmering Brazilian blue sky and gaze unblinking at the furious eye of the monsoon.

In the pre-Cambrian, when all the world was weeds and nothing crawled or swam or flew, the earthgods ruled the last non-violent era 'til the sun grows red and swollen and all life is fled. They could have made their kingdom of the plants as perfect as I'll make this world of men and there would never have been need for any other form of life. They could have kept this planet for their own – and yet did not.

I wonder why?

Instead, they let the fish glide in upon the wild, Silurian tide and took their forms and played with them… yet never made this world a cool Piscean paradise. Nor when the fish with legs boiled up from the Devonian mud did they impose reptilian utopia – but watched instead, delighting in the dazzling diversity of shapes and shades composed of cycads and Jurassic

ferns. They'd imitate the upstart beasts, frightening thunder-lizards off with thunder of their own.

In the Cretaceous, when the earth grew tired of saurians, erasing them with frost, turning her hand instead to apes and cherry trees, her guardians made no move to stay that hand and let the age of dinosaurs endure... but mourned their loss while finding consolation in the earth's first flowers, sprung from the mud where those vast bodies fell.

Is this, then, what it is to be a god? To know and never do? To watch the world wind by and in its windings find content?

If I should feed the world, heal all the wounds Man's smouldering industries have made, what would he do? Would he renounce the wealth his sawmills bring, step gently on the flowers instead, and pluck each apple with respect for this abundant world in all its providence?

No.

He would pump more poisons, build more mines, safe in the knowledge that I stood on hand to mend the biosphere, endlessly covering the scars he could now endlessly inflict. Somewhere the Parliament stand rooted, inert and omnipotent, while tiny spiders drape their ribs in silk. After this night of reverie, at last I comprehend their stance.

I cannot mend the world without committing greater wrong yet have no wish to be eternally exposed to all its pains. Mankind must stand or fall by its merits alone..."

This is essentially a monologue in which Moore, through his character, muses that the world must be one of physical consequence for all its living inhabitants – for this is the only way anyone, or anything, can ever learn, be trained or evolve. The logic of the wood here is that interference is a more consequential wrong than non-interference whilst probably also inevitably noting that physical existence is never a safe space without consequence however it and its relationships are arranged. Things must learn, or fail to learn, to do what they can for themselves together. Those that do might prosper and survive (although there is never any guarantee) and those that don't, won't. There is no room for any sentimental tears about that, however, for the alternative is the interference and conflict of constant war for the right to impose realities upon people and things. There is no world, natural or otherwise, in which there are no casualties or consequences. This monologue essentially then argues that nature proceeds by each part of it simply doing what it does and without any general concern or oversight or morality (in terms of responsibility). Nature, according to "the wood", is non-interventionist and anything that intervenes only finds, or creates, trouble – but to no ultimate end for the whole is not to be controlled anyway. The best solution is ultimately "let it be" and look after your own peace. The whole, nature, co-exists at its best when it is left alone and things simply be what they are and mind their own business inasmuch as they can or will.

I think Moore is certainly trying to present an alternative morality and ethics in and through that. I would not hesitate to describe it as a form of anarchy as some perceive it. It bears some resemblance, for example, to the pacifist anarchism of the Russian author, Leo Tolstoy, who took inspiration from Jesus in the gospels with his seeming teaching of non-aggression (for example, in Matthew 5), primarily in his book *The Kingdom of God is Within You* which is made fundamental to the "Christian anarchism" detailed in the book of the same name by the political academic Alexandre Christoyannopolis. I find that

interesting for why would we imagine “the ethics of nature” was a strictly or uniquely human ethics? So Moore imagines an ethic or ethics of nature as part of his story too, a non-interventionist ethic in which things should take care of themselves and their surroundings as self-preservational matters unconnected to “big picture” questions about coercions of, or destinations for, the whole. Indeed, strictly speaking, what the whole is, becomes or amounts to is imagined something that should be of no concern for, so Moore seems to suggest, nature is never a matter of a grand, teleological plan. There is no destination or desired totalising outcome – and certainly not in advance. Nature is not made that way. It is the emergent result of myriad interacting phenomena. And, so Moore seems to suggest, it should remain that way, free from coercion to ANY specific outcome.

That idea is interesting in itself and leads us into more scientific explorations about “the nature of nature” and the processes that appear to constitute life within it. Here I turn, not least, to the genuinely pioneering work of microbiologist Lynn Margulis who, by herself and with others, has hypothesised, discussed and elucidated several ideas pertinent to the subject of nature. The first of these I want to mention is “symbiosis”, the simple fact of life form and organism living cheek by jowl with (and sometimes even within in what is called endosymbiosis) other, differing life forms and organisms. As Margulis explains in her book *Symbiotic Planet: A New Look at Evolution* which, significantly, begins with a chapter titled “Symbiosis Everywhere”:

“*Symbiosis, the system in which members of different species live in physical contact, strikes us as an arcane concept and a specialized biological term. This is because of our lack of awareness of its prevalence. Not only are our guts and eyelashes festooned with bacterial and animal symbionts, but if you look at your backyard or community park, symbionts are not obvious but they are omnipresent. Clover and vetch, common weeds, have little balls on*

their roots. These are the nitrogen-fixing bacteria that are essential for healthy growth in nitrogen-poor soil. Then take the trees, the maple, oak, and hickory. As many as three hundred different fungal symbionts, the mycorrhizae we notice as mushrooms, are entwined in their roots. Or look at a dog, who usually fails to notice the symbiotic worms in his gut. We are symbionts on a symbiotic planet, and if we care to, we can find symbiosis everywhere. Physical contact is a non-negotiable requisite for many differing kinds of life."

The picture summoned here is a very simple one: life in nature is pressed up against other life and expected to get along, to co-exist, to find or form alliances or, in other ways, enable the fact of co-existence. Note that this does not mean one species wiping out all the others to leave the habitat to itself. Symbiosis inherently means both diversity and co-existence. Indeed, Margulis makes the fact of symbiosis integral to evolution of life itself:

"*Symbiosis... is crucial to an understanding of evolutionary novelty and the origin of species. Indeed, I believe the idea of species itself requires symbiosis. Bacteria do not have species. No species existed before bacteria merged to form larger cells including ancestors to both plants and animals... long-standing symbiosis led first to the evolution of complex cells with nuclei and from there to other organisms such as fungi, plants, and animals. That animal and plant cells originated through symbiosis is no longer controversial. Molecular biology, including gene sequencing, has vindicated this aspect of my theory of cell symbiosis. The permanent incorporation of bacteria inside plant and animal cells as plastids and mitochondria is the part of my serial endosymbiosis theory that now appears even in high school textbooks.*"

Margulis, who imagines symbiosis sometimes leads to life forms merging to create new, merged life forms, can also detail examples of the phenomenon:

"Living beings defy neat definition. They fight, they feed, they dance, they mate, they die. At the base of the creativity of all large familiar forms of life, symbiosis generates novelty. It brings together different life-forms, always for a reason. Often, hunger unites the predator with the prey or the mouth with the photosynthetic bacterium or algal victim. Symbiogenesis brings together unlike individuals to make large, more complex entities. Symbiogenetic life-forms are even more unlike than their unlikely 'parents.' 'Individuals' permanently merge and regulate their reproduction. They generate new populations that become multi-unit symbiotic new individuals. These become 'new individuals' at larger, more inclusive levels of integration. Symbiosis is not a marginal or rare phenomenon. It is natural and common. We abide in a symbiotic world.

In Brittany, on the north-west coast of France, and along beaches bordering the English Channel is found a strange sort of 'seaweed' that is not seaweed at all. From a distance it is a bright green patch on the sand. The patches slosh around, shimmering in shallow puddles. When you pick up the green water and let it slip through your fingers you notice gooey ribbons much like seaweed. A small hand lens or low-power microscope reveals that what looked like seaweed are really green worms. These masses of sunbathing green worms, unlike any seaweed, burrow into the sand and effectively disappear. They were first described in the 1920s by an Englishman, J. Keeble, who spent his summers at Roscoff. Keeble called them 'plant-animals' and diagrammed them splendidly in the color frontispiece of his book, Plant-Animals. The flatworms of the species Convoluta roscoffensis are all green because their tissues are packed with Platymonas cells; as the worms are translucent, the green color of Platymonas, photosynthesizing algae, shows through. Although lovely, the green algae are not merely decorative: they live and grow, die and reproduce, inside the bodies of the worms. Indeed they produce the food that the worms 'eat.' The mouths of the worms become superfluous and do not function after the worm

larvae hatch. Sunlight reaches the algae inside their mobile greenhouses and allows them to grow and feed themselves as they leak photosynthetic products and feed their hosts from the inside. The symbiotic algae even do the worm a waste management favor: they recycle the worm's uric acid waste into nutrients for themselves. Algae and worm make a miniature ecosystem swimming in the sun, Indeed, these two beings are so intimate that it is difficult, without very high-power microscopy, to say where the animal ends and the algae begin."

How's that for symbiosis? Of course, we should not find this idea of one organism living inside another disgusting – for, as Margulis has already pointed out, we are also examples of exactly the same thing. Various bacterial and microbial life forms, which are separate organisms, form an absolutely common part of any human body. That body would not be what it is, or work as it does, without them. But these organisms are not "us" any more than a domestic pet (with its own symbionts) we might share living space with is. Symbiosis, then, is not just a matter of having company but cooperating (knowingly or unknowingly!) in the propagation of different lives at the same time. It is a natural means of life maintenance and even new creation. What needs to be understood here is that symbiosis, understood as Margulis' own "Serial Endosymbiosis Theory" (SET), is a theory about nature, and specifically life, itself. It is a theory which posits the mechanics of life as organisms as small as cells "live together" (and even merge with one another or live one inside the other) in ways that result in new forms of life. Thus:

"*SET is a theory of coming together, of merging of cells of different histories and abilities. Before serial endosymbiosis and the establishment of the aerobic nucleated cell, no cell-fusion sex existed. Meiotic sex, like that of the egg fertilized by the sperm, came later. Serial endosymbiosis made our kind of fusion sex possible. Sex, too, is the coming together, the*

merging of cells of different histories and abilities. In sex the cells that fuse are closely related and the fusion is reversible; in serial endosymbiosis the cells that fuse are only distantly related, and the fusion is permanent."

In this way we see that symbiosis is something right at the heart of biological understanding itself.

A second aspect of life (and so nature) that Lynn Margulis discusses is called "autopoiesis". This is a word that is made by putting Greek words for 'the self' and 'to do' or 'to make' together to create a word which means something like "self-making" or "the doing of oneself". In natural, biological terms it is the idea that life is that which, of first importance, can maintain itself. So we can see that there it accords both with my own earlier stated ideas about life as self-organisation but also bears favourable comparison with the Daoist idea of "ziran" – that 'natural spontaneity' which is 'so of its own'. In her book *What is Life?* (written together with her eldest son Dorion Sagan whose father was Carl Sagan) Margulis speaks to the importance and consequence of autopoiesis for life and so nature:

"*the body concentrates order. It continuously self-repairs. Every five days you get a new stomach lining. You get a new liver every two months. Your skin replaces itself every six weeks. Every year, 98 percent of the atoms of your body are replaced. This non-stop chemical replacement, metabolism, is a sure sign of life. This 'machine' demands continual input of chemical energy and materials (food).*

Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela see in metabolism the essence of something quite fundamental to life. They call it "autopoiesis". Coming from Greek roots

meaning self (auto) and making (poiein, as in 'poetry'), autopoiesis refers to life's continuous production of itself. Without autopoietic behaviour, organic beings do not self-maintain – they are not alive.

An autopoietic entity metabolizes continuously; it perpetuates itself through chemical activity, the movement of molecules. Autopoiesis entails energy expenditure and the making of messes. Autopoiesis, indeed, is detectable by that incessant life chemistry and energy flow which is metabolism. Only cells, organisms made of cells, and biospheres made of organisms are autopoietic and can metabolise..."

I will come to that latter part about "biospheres made of organisms" shortly when I come to Margulis' most controversial point. First, however, there is more to say about autopoiesis:

"*Identity and self-maintenance require metabolism. Metabolic chemistry (often called physiology) precedes reproduction and evolution. For a population to evolve, its members must reproduce. Yet before any organic being can reproduce, it must first self-maintain. Within the lifetime of a cell, each of 5,000 or so different proteins will completely interchange with the surroundings thousands of times. Bacterial cells produce DNA and RNA (nucleic acids), enzyme proteins, fats, carbohydrates, and other complex carbon chemicals. Protoctist, fungi, animal, and plant bodies all produce these and other substances as well. But most importantly, and amazingly, any living body produces itself.*

This energetic maintenance of unity while components are continuously or intermittently rearranged, destroyed and rebuilt, broken and repaired, is metabolism, and it requires energy. In accordance with the second law of thermodynamics, autopoietic self-

maintenance preserves or increases internal order only by adding to the 'disorder' of the external world, as wastes are excreted and heat is vented. All living beings must metabolize and therefore all must create local disorder: useless heat, noise, and uncertainty. This is autopoietic behaviour, reflecting the autopoietic imperative required for any organic being that lives, that continues to function.

The autopoietic view of life differs from standard teachings in biology. Most writers of biology texts imply that an organism exists apart from its environment, and that the environment is mostly a static, non-living backdrop. Organic beings and environment, however, interweave. Soil, for example, is not unalive. It is a mixture of broken rock, pollen, fungal filaments, ciliate cysts, bacterial spores, nematodes, and other microscopic animals and their parts. 'Nature,' Aristotle observed, 'proceeds little by little from things lifeless to animal life in such a way that it is impossible to determine the exact line of demarcation.' Independence is a political, not a scientific, term...

... it is the sum of these uncountable interactions that yields the largest level of life: the blue biosphere in all the holarchic coherence and mysterious grandeur of its evolution from the black cosmos."

Here we see how fundamental autopoiesis is for life in nature for, without it, nothing else would follow. Nature, without autopoiesis, would be lifeless. It would not be nature as we know it. It is interesting, then, in this respect that Margulis regards autopoiesis as a feature of all life from the cell all the way up to the planet as an organism in its own right (which I will address shortly). Autopoiesis and symbiosis together are then two absolutely necessary features of a nature that is alive – and that from the cellular level up.

The third item I want to address from Lynn Margulis is much less accepted than the first two – but I don't necessarily see why it should be because it is really only implementing what she has to say about symbiosis and autopoiesis. The problem is that, superficially, what she (and James Lovelock, the atmospheric chemist who first thought of the idea and whom Margulis worked with in order to try and give it scientific validity) had to say sounds outlandish. It is the idea that the biosphere (primarily the atmosphere and the living outer crust of the earth together) IS ALIVE in what is known as "the Gaia Hypothesis".

In *What is Life?* Margulis and Dorion Sagan go on to talk about "the autopoietic planet" after discussing autopoiesis. They say that "The biosphere as a whole is autopoietic in the sense that it maintains itself." They make an argument for the living population of the earth (primarily in its carbon dioxide-consuming beings – plants, algae, photosynthetic and methane-producing bacteria) interacting with the atmosphere to maintain it in such a way as it produces a stable window for the life we see all around us and are examples of in ourselves. The argument is that autopoietic beings have created what we see now, an atmosphere with almost no carbon dioxide and 20% oxygen which is so different from our nearest planetary neighbours (where the life we see and experience would be impossible). Life itself, meanwhile, as even a possibility, requires some kind of stability in all sorts of ways – atmospheric, temperature-wise, etc. One thing by itself is utterly incapable of providing that and, as you might intuit from the other ideas I have shared from Lynn Margulis, she consequently imagines a cooperative, cumulatively interactive, intimate kind of life on earth – of necessity if for no other reason. In other words, she imagines that what you observe at the macro level in terms of stability is because of the autopoietic symbiosis and interactivity happening below it. Everything, without plan, teleology or deliberation, in other words, is producing the effect of this "life together" that we see and participate in. So, in *What is Life?* Margulis and Sagan say:

"*... in our view autopoiesis of the planet is the aggregate, emergent property of the many gas-trading, gene-exchanging, growing, and evolving organisms in it. As human body regulation of temperature and blood chemistry emerges from relations among the body's component cells, so planetary regulation evolved from eons of interactions among Earth's living inhabitants.*

Using the energy of sunlight, only green plants, algae, and certain green and purple colored bacteria can convert compounds from surrounding water and air into the living stuff of their bodies. This sun-energized process, photosynthesis, is the nutritional basis for the rest of life. Animals, fungi, and most bacteria feed on the purple and green producers. Photosynthesis evolved in microbes soon after the origin of life. At every level, from microbe to planet, organic beings use air and water or other organic beings to build their reproducing selves. Local ecology becomes global ecology. As a corollary, and in spite of English grammar, life does not exist ON Earth's surface so much as it IS Earth's surface… This is no vague philosophical claim but rather a physiological truth of our lives. Organisms are less self-enclosed, autonomous individuals than communities of bodies exchanging matter, energy, and information with others. Each breath connects us to the rest of the biosphere, which also 'breathes', albeit at a slower pace... Taken at its greatest physiological extent, life IS the planetary surface. Earth is no more a planet-sized chunk of rock inhabited with life than your body is a skeleton infested with cells."

Margulis and her son, Dorion Sagan, discuss this further in an essay from their book *Dazzle Gradually: Reflections on the Nature of Nature* titled "Gaia and Philosophy". One reason Gaia, as an idea, seems to rub certain scientists (e.g. Richard Dawkins) up the wrong way is because it seems to come far too close to two things Western scientists (particularly the kinds that imagine themselves striving for "objectivity" or "truth") try to

separate themselves from: fiction and religion. Margulis and Sagan in fact admit as much in this essay:

"*Gaia is a theory of the atmosphere and surface sediments of the planet Earth taken as a whole. The Gaia hypothesis in its most general form states that the temperature and composition of Earth's atmosphere are actively regulated by the sum of life on the planet—the biota. This regulation of Earth's surface by and for the biota has been in continuous existence since the earliest appearance of widespread life. The assurance of continued global habitability, according to the Gaian hypothesis, is not a matter merely of chance. The Gaian view of the atmosphere is a radical departure from the former scientific concept that life on Earth is surrounded by and adapts to an essentially static environment. That life interacts with and eventually becomes its own environment; that the atmosphere is an extension of the biosphere in nearly the same sense that the human mind is an extension of DNA; that life interacts with and controls physical attributes of Earth on a global scale—all these things resonate strongly with the ancient magico-religious sentiment that all is one.*"

Margulis and Sagan, however (as with the originator of the hypothesis, James Lovelock), do not imagine that there is anything either strictly fictional or mystical about Gaia (as with some others there might be). They are for it on the basis of simple science and our developing understanding of how living materiality works and interacts and what the consequences of that can be. Thus, Margulis and Sagan insist that:

"*readers can be convinced that it is theoretically possible for living, growing, responding communities of organisms to exert control over factors concerning their own survival. No unknown conscious forces need be invoked; temperature regulation becomes a consequence of the well-known properties of life's responsiveness and growth. In fact, perhaps the most*

striking philosophical conclusion is that the cybernetic control of Earth's surface by unintelligent organisms calls into question the alleged uniqueness of human intelligent consciousness."

If we take Gaia as a story, however, even as one we imagine is true, it does certainly put a dent into the human ego – for it relegates the human species to a bit part player rather than seeing the human as nature's finest, and most necessary, achievement. Gaia, understood one way, is about how billions of life forms, many so tiny you can't see them with the naked eye because they are bacterial or microbial, act together, without knowledge aforethought or teleological intent, to create an environment for themselves (and, incidentally, for lots of other things too). If we imagine a forest can do that – and many arborists do, including Peter Wohlleben whose work I discussed above – then why not a whole biosphere? The nature writer Robert Macfarlane recently brought out a book in Spring of 2025 asking "Is a river alive?". What his young son answered instinctively in the positive (and if we can talk of rivers "dying" then that at least implies they must have formerly been alive in order to die), Macfarlane the older takes a few hundred pages to expedite in more flowery detail – but his conclusion remains the same as his son's – of course a river is alive! It is a system of uncountable interactions between all kinds of forces, energies, beings and habitats which, in interaction, produce a mutually beneficial ecosystem, a connected living organism, a thing of consequence. For myself, it doesn't really matter so much if we call that "alive" or not – only that we recognise that what we would call a living river has innumerable benefits over what we would call a dead one. In addition, it is a matter of asking about and recognising what makes the former and prevents the latter.

The Gaia Hypothesis itself, in what must be my very brief appraisal of it here, is then very much focused on the biota and the atmosphere together interacting in order to create what is actually a very narrow window in which life on this planet can survive at all. Should we imagine that this narrow window has simply been created at random according to some unknown law (by what?) and might suddenly just go away again one day, equally at random? Should we imagine some god has created it and fixed it in place because it delights his divine intelligence? Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan are just two of those convinced that, actually, living things are interacting with their environment biochemically in such a way as to create the stability (atmospheric as much as anything else) which allows life in its many diverse, and continually diversifying, forms to continue in a necessary habitat (space becomes place). So, for example:

"*In the Gaian theory of the atmosphere, life continually synthesizes and removes the gases necessary for its own survival. Life controls the composition of the reactive atmospheric gases. Mars and Venus, and the hypothetical dead Earth devoid of life, all have chemically stable atmospheres composed of over 95 percent carbon dioxide. Earth as we live on it, however, has only 0.03 percent of this stable gas in its atmosphere. The anomaly is largely due to one facet of Gaia's operations, namely, the process of photosynthesis. Bacteria, algae, and plants continuously remove carbon dioxide from the air via photosynthesis and incorporate the carbon from the gas into solid structures such as limestone reefs and eventually animal shells. Much of the carbon in the air as carbon dioxide becomes incorporated into organisms that are eventually buried. The bodies of deceased photosynthetic microbes and plants, as well as of all other living forms that consume photosynthetic organisms, are buried in soil in the form of carbon compounds of various kinds. By using solar energy to turn carbon dioxide into calcium carbonates or organic compounds of living organisms, and then dying, plants, photosynthetic bacteria, and algae*

have trapped and buried the once atmospheric carbon dioxide, which geochemists agree was the major gas in Earth's early atmosphere. If not for life, and Gaia's cyclical modus operandi, our Earth's atmosphere would be more like those of Venus and Mars. Carbon dioxide would be its major gas even now."

And we wouldn't be here (as we might not be if humans continue putting carbon back into the air which is counteracting what the other life is doing) along with all the other life that is producing, and maintaining, the Gaian life window. Yet, further:

"*Microbes, the first forms of life to evolve, seem in fact to be at the very center of the Gaian phenomenon. Photosynthetic bacteria were burying carbon and releasing waste oxygen millions of years before the development of plants and animals. Methanogens and some sulfur-transforming bacteria, which do not tolerate any free oxygen, have been involved with the Gaian regulation of atmospheric gases from the very beginning. From a Gaian point of view animals, all of which are covered with and invaded by gas-exchanging microbes, may be simply a convenient way to distribute these microbes more numerously and evenly over the surface of the globe. Animals and even plants are latecomers to the Gaian scene. The earliest communities of organisms that removed atmospheric carbon dioxide on a large scale must have been microbes. In fact, we have a direct record of their activities in the form of fossils. These members of the ancient microbial world constructed complex microbial mats, some of which were preserved as stromatolites, layered rocks whose genesis both now and billions of years ago is due to microbial activities. Although such carbon-dioxide-removing communities of microbes still flourish today, they have been supplemented and camouflaged by more conspicuous communities of organisms such as forests and coral reefs.*

To maintain temperature and gas composition at livable values, microbial life reacts to threats in a controlled, seemingly purposeful manner. For instance, if atmospheric oxygen were to decrease only a few percentage points, all animal life dependent on higher concentrations would perish. On the other hand, as Andrew Watson and his colleagues showed, increases in the level of atmospheric oxygen would lead to dangerous forest fires; small increases of oxygen would lead to forest fires even in soggy rain forests due to ignition by lightning. Thus the quantity of oxygen in the atmosphere must have remained relatively constant since the time that air-breathing animals have been living in forests—which has been over three hundred million years. Just as bees and termites control the temperature and humidity of the air in their hives and nests, so the biota somehow controls the concentration of oxygen and other gases in Earth's atmosphere."

Unless, of course, you think that life on earth as it has appeared is either a huge concatenation of coincidences or the deliberation of some superior mind or incontrovertible law of the universe. For myself, it makes sense to me that life, described earlier by Margulis as symbiotic and autopoietic, can affect its surroundings for its own benefit, both individually and as an overall, cumulative effect of multiple and diverse interactions. Isn't that what autopoiesis itself is actually all about? That this then has what Margulis, Sagan and Lovelock describe as Gaian effects is only extrapolating the consequences of this further in terms of what happens when billions of life forms actively, independently and interdependently want to survive.

Yet if you think the Gaia Hypothesis is a fictional step too far then why not embrace the more obviously fictional itself and see what we can learn from that in turn? Here we might be thinking in two related areas, the religious and folklore. In the British conception of "folk horror" we often find these two combined and the best example of that – by far – is

the 1973 British film, *The Wicker Man*, which is set on a remote island community off the Scottish west coast called “Summerisle”. Here, in a simple synopsis of the plot, the islanders, together with their leader, Lord Summerisle (played by Sir Christopher Lee), are adherents of a pagan religion who survive by growing exotic crops of fruit and other things but, when their crops suddenly and disastrously fail one year, they lure a virginal and extremely puritan Christian police officer (played by Edward Woodward) from the mainland to their private island where he is to be burnt together with other animals as a sacrifice to appease their gods – in their minds then leading to the fruitfulness of their agriculture once again, their naturalistic gods now appropriately appeased.

The cult depicted in the film itself is a syncretic one and no real or historical religious community is intended. Consequently, the pagan religion depicted is constructed from various sources (Celtic, Greek and simple fantasy being just three). The writer, Anthony Shaffer, and the director, Robin Hardy, did focus quite a lot on Celtic gods (for example, the sun god Nuada or the sea god to whom beer is sacrificed, Shoney) and various folklorish practices (May Day, maypoles, the hobby horse, Mr Punch, use of stone circles) from around the British Isles to lend the film a sheen of local authenticity. But there neither is, nor was there, any actual historical religion that combines the elements used as the script for this film does. More importantly for my purposes, that religion, and the consequent religious beliefs of the islanders, are shown to be deeply and overtly erotic, generative and regenerative (for example with May Day and the sacrifice of the police officer as taking place on “the day of death and rebirth”), about nature’s energies and sexuality. This is an overt part of the film and the cult’s nature mythology as depicted in it.

It would be as well to demonstrate this by giving some detailed examples from the film. The first is that all the women and girls in the film are named after trees or flowers

(Willow MacGregor, Miss Rose, May Morrison, Rowan Morrison, Myrtle Morrison, Daisy - one of the schoolgirls who is asked about the Maypole's meaning). A further example is a speech Lord Summerisle gives early on in the film when bringing a youth (according to the script) to visit Willow (played by Britt Ekland) in order to engage sexually. Lord Summerisle appears with the youth below Willow's window and calls up to her whereupon the youth, Ash Buchannan, is presented to her and he is invited up for sex. Whilst this scene plays out (intercut with the song "Gently Johnny" being sung by people at The Green Man inn where Willow lives with her father, the landlord), Lord Summerisle is given a speech which is spoken over intercut footage of snails on leaves and the praying Sergeant Howie (the plot's unwitting victim) in his pyjamas. The interesting thing about Lord Summerisle's speech, however, is that it turns out to be adapted excerpts from Walt Whitman's famous poem, "Song of Myself", specifically from the 32nd stanza:

"*I think I could turn and live with animals. They are so placid and self-contained. They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins. They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God. Not one of them kneels to another or to his own kind that lived thousands of years ago. Not one of them is respectable or unhappy. All over the earth.*"

The actual full text as written by Whitman goes as follows:

"*I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contain'd;*
I stand and look at them long and long.

They do not sweat and whine about their condition;
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins;
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God;

Not one is dissatisfied—not one is demented with the mania of owning things;
Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago;
Not one is respectable or industrious over the whole earth."

Whitman himself was known as an earthy, often sexual, naturalistic writer linked with the American "Transcendentalists" such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Compare, for example, the following sections from "I Sing the Body Electric," stanzas 5-6 (which is also from his famous poetry compendium, *Leaves of Grass*):

"*5*
This is the female form,
A divine nimbus exhales from it from head to foot,
It attracts with fierce undeniable attraction,
I am drawn by its breath as if I were no more than a helpless vapor, all falls aside but myself and it,
Books, art, religion, time, the visible and solid earth, and what was expected of heaven or fear'd of hell, are now consumed,
Mad filaments, ungovernable shoots play out of it, the response likewise ungovernable,
Hair, bosom, hips, bend of legs, negligent falling hands all diffused, mine too diffused,
Ebb stung by the flow and flow stung by the ebb, love-flesh swelling and deliciously aching,
Limitless limpid jets of love hot and enormous, quivering jelly of love, white-blow and delirious juice,
Bridegroom night of love working surely and softly into the prostrate dawn,
Undulating into the willing and yielding day,
Lost in the cleave of the clasping and sweet-flesh'd day.

This the nucleus—after the child is born of woman, man is born of woman,

This the bath of birth, this the merge of small and large, and the outlet again.

Be not ashamed women, your privilege encloses the rest, and is the exit of the rest,

You are the gates of the body, and you are the gates of the soul.

The female contains all qualities and tempers them,

She is in her place and moves with perfect balance,

She is all things duly veil'd, she is both passive and active,

She is to conceive daughters as well as sons, and sons as well as daughters.

As I see my soul reflected in Nature,

As I see through a mist, One with inexpressible completeness, sanity, beauty,

See the bent head and arms folded over the breast, the Female I see.

6

The male is not less the soul nor more, he too is in his place,

He too is all qualities, he is action and power,

The flush of the known universe is in him,

Scorn becomes him well, and appetite and defiance become him well,

The wildest largest passions, bliss that is utmost, sorrow that is utmost become him well, pride is for him,

The full-spread pride of man is calming and excellent to the soul,

Knowledge becomes him, he likes it always, he brings every thing to the test of himself,

Whatever the survey, whatever the sea and the sail he strikes soundings at last only here,

(Where else does he strike soundings except here?)

The man's body is sacred and the woman's body is sacred,

No matter who it is, it is sacred—is it the meanest one in the laborers' gang?

Is it one of the dull-faced immigrants just landed on the wharf?

Each belongs here or anywhere just as much as the well-off, just as much as you,

Each has his or her place in the procession.

(All is a procession,

The universe is a procession with measured and perfect motion.)

Do you know so much yourself that you call the meanest ignorant?

Do you suppose you have a right to a good sight, and he or she has no right to a sight?

Do you think matter has cohered together from its diffuse float, and the soil is on the surface, and water runs and vegetation sprouts,

For you only, and not for him and her? "

Using Whitman's words put into Lord Summerisle's mouth over a sexual scene which eulogises the natural, animal world in a feral habitat, then, (this was not in the script so must have been added during filming or in post-production with voiceover) is not any way to lessen the naturalistic sexual materialism, or earthiness, of that scene for these are also components of Whitman's own oeuvre. Now consider the words of the song playing during this scene as well:

Gently Johnny

"I put my hand on her knee

And she says, do you want to see?

I put my hand on her breast

And she says, do you want a kiss?

(Chorus)

Gently, gently

Gently Johnny

Gently Johnny

My giggalo

I put my hand on her thigh

And she says, do you want to try?

I put my hand on her belly

And she says, do you want to fill me?

(Chorus)

Gently, gently

Gently Johnny

Gently Johnny

My giggalo”

Following is some of the lyrics to further songs from the film soundtrack. (The film, in fact, actually makes a good stab at being a musical!)

Corn Rigs (the song which accompanies the arrival of Sergeant Howie to Summerisle)

“It was upon a Lammas night

When corn rigs are bonnie

Beneath the moon's unclouded light

I held awhile to Annie

The time went by with careless heed

'Till 'tween the late and early

With small persuasion she agreed

To see me through the barley

(Chrous)

Corn rigs and barley rigs and

Corn rigs are bonnie

I'll not forget that happy night

Among the rigs with Annie

The sky was blue, the wind was still

The moon was shining clearly

I set her down with right goodwill

Among the rigs o' barley

I kent her heart was my own

I loved her most sincerely

I kissed her o'er and o'er again

Among the rigs of barley

(Chorus)

Corn rigs and barley rigs and

Corn rigs are bonnie

I'll not forget that happy night

Among the rigs with Annie”

The Landlord’s Daughter (A song about Willow MacGregor sung in the pub at which she is present)

“Much has been said of the strumpets of yore

Of wenches and bawdy house queens by the score

But I sing of a baggage that we all adore

The landlord's daughter

Oh, her lips are as rose as her wine is a treat

Her whisky is good and her figure is neat

And while she is serving her bitter, she's sweet

The landlord's daughter

(Chorus)

You'll never love another

Although she's not the kind of girl

To take home to your mother

Her ale, it is lively and strong to the taste

'Tis brewed with discretion and never with haste

You can have all you like if you swear not to waste

The landlord's daughter

(Chorus)

And when her name is mentioned

The parts of every gentleman

Do stand up at attention!

Now, there's Jane of the blossom and Doll of the crown

Pretty Kate of her Garter and Star down in town

Fat Dolly who keeps her red heart of renown

But I'll take the landlord's daughter

(Chorus)

Oh, nothing can delight so

As does the part that lies between

Her left toe and her right toe”

The scene with Willow MacGregor and Ash Buchannan having sex which is intercut with Lord Summerisle’s quoting of Walt Whitman and the song “Gently Johnny” is immediately followed by a scene in which schoolboys, led by their male teacher, sing a song and dance around a maypole as the schoolgirls tap along on their desks in the schoolroom. The song “Maypole” itself is obviously about a circle of life and regeneration within nature:

Maypole

“In the woods there grew a tree

And a fine fine tree was he

And on that tree there was a limb

And on that limb there was a branch

And on that branch there was a nest

And in that nest there was an egg

And in that egg there was a bird

And from that bird a feather came

And of that feather was a bed

And on that bed there was a girl

And on that girl there was a man

And from that man there was a seed

And from that seed there was a boy

And from that boy there was a man

And for that man there was a grave

From that grave there grew a tree

In the Summerisle, Summerisle, Summerisle, Summerisle, wood”

In a later scene in the film Sergeant Howie, our unknowing sacrifice who is investigating the supposed disappearance of one Rowan Morrison, having been induced to believe she is missing, goes to see Lord Summerisle at his residence. As he draws up to it in a pony and trap he sees naked teen girls dancing and jumping over a fire inside a stone circle. Lord Summerisle consequently explains to him why but the song “Fire Leap” they sing as they perform their ritual dancing explains this just as well:

Fire Leap

“Take the flame inside you
Burn and burn below
Fire seed and fire feed
To make the baby grow

Take the flame inside you
Burn and burn belay
Fire seed and fire feed
To make the baby stay

Take the flame inside you
Burn and burn belong
Fire seed and fire feed
And make the baby strong

Take the flame inside you
Burn and burn belie
Fire seed and fire feed
To make the baby cry

Take the flame inside you
Burn and burn begin
Fire seed and fire feed
To make the baby King”

Sergeant Howie is billeted in The Green Man inn during his stay on the island. (The “Green Man” is itself a significant cultural figure in British mythological history, one Alan Moore seems to run with in his imagining of Swamp Thing.) This brings him into contact with Willow, “the landlord’s daughter” of the earlier song. But she also has her own song in the film too and it is one of open seduction in regard to Sergeant Howie – who finds himself vexed as a consequence since he is engaged to be married and does not believe in sex outside of marriage in any case. Willow dances nude as she sings her song in the room next to his:

Willow’s Song

“Heigh ho! Who is there?
No one but me, my dear
Please come say, How do?
The things I'll give to you

By stroke as gentle as a feather
I'll catch a rainbow from the sky
And tie the ends together

Heigh ho! I am here
Am I not young and fair?
Please come say, How do?
The things I'll show to you

Would you have a wond'rous sight

The midday sun at midnight?

Fair maid, white and red
Comb you smooth and stroke your head
How a maid can milk a bull!
And every stroke a bucketful”

A further song, “The Tinker of Rye”, was composed for a scene in the film but this ended up not being used. It was sung by Lord Summerisle and the girls’ schoolteacher, Miss Rose. It was a song rich in sexual metaphor:

The Tinker of Rye

“(Verse 1 - Lord Summerisle)
There was a tinker lived of late, who walked the streets of Rye
He bore his pack upon his back, patches and plugs did cry
‘Oh, I have brass within my bag, my hammer's full of metal
And as to skill, I well can clout and mend a broken kettle’

(Verse 2 - Miss Rose)
A maiden did this tinker meet, and to him boldly say:
‘For sure my kettle hath much need, if you will pass my way’
She took the tinker by the hand and led him to her door
Says she, ‘My kettle I will show, and you can clout it sure’

(Chorus - Both)

For patching and plugging is his delight

(Only Lord Summerisle)

His work goes forward, day and night

(Verse 3 - Lord Summerisle)

‘Fair maid,’ says he, ‘your kettle's cracked, the cause is plainly told:

There hath so many nails been drove mine own could not take hold’

(Verse 4 - Miss Rose)

Says she, ‘It hath endured some knocks, and more it may, I know

I’m sure a large, large nail will hold if it was struck in so’

(Chorus - Only Miss Rose)

For patching and plugging is his delight

His work goes forward, day and night”

All that gives a fairly comprehensive display of the content of the lyrics used in songs throughout most of *The Wicker Man*. It is indicative of the islanders’ beliefs, and so the content of their sexual nature cult, on Summerisle itself. This is a very erotic, earthy thing with no shame about sex whatsoever since it is seen as a profoundly natural act, one in which all life naturally partakes without ceremony as a possible mythological example of the physical intimacy of nature spoken of scientifically in previous pages. In that it is indicative of many apparent ancient beliefs and religions – not least the Celtic one from which it majorly borrows with its gods and goddesses of earth, sea, land and sky. We are probably talking here about some form of animism mixed in with a reverence for life,

death, love and their energies as well. Dionysos, for example, a Greek god of wine, festivity and vegetation, was also known as a god of trees and was a dying and rising god in addition. His rebirth was celebrated in the Spring and death was very much a necessary part of his cult as was fecund excess, a kind of divine, joyous, natural madness. So these are not uncommon themes from a religious or folklorish perspective.

But we turn now, in continuing to attempt an answer at our question “What is nature?”, to matters more philosophical by interacting with the British philosopher Kate Soper’s book *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non-Human*. This book title could be slightly misleading for Soper’s book is not actually an open discussion of “What is nature?” as a general question. Rather, the book discusses discourse about nature itself and particularly entries into that discourse which (in the 1990s when it was written) seemed to be coming from either ecologically concerned or postmodern participants which, in the book, seems often set up as some sort of opposition in which the ecologists take the pro-nature point of view whilst the postmodernists take the “everything is cultural” side of the argument that can then be constructed as a “nature vs culture” argument. Soper, consequently, wants to investigate such positions and their effects as much as she wants to interrogate “nature” itself and it seems hardly unintentional, in that case, that the cover photo of her book is a chicken looking at an egg. (Which came first?)

That this takes place under the auspices of Enlightenment and Post-Enlightenment thought should then not be lost on us. Soper, certainly, is not wary of making reference to that intellectual movement’s “technocratic Prometheanism” or its “humanism” or its “instrumental rationality”, things which may be observed to “distort the truth” or “our relations with nature” and be “responsible for abusive and alienating exploitations of the environment”. In such intellectual currents there is rarely the sense of our intimate

dependency upon a natural world and, indeed, our necessary integration within it since it is the greater phenomenon. Thinking back to Alan Moore's imaginative creation of a "way of the wood" in *Swamp Thing*, we would do well to recall that there it was not the way of human beings. In our own world, overlapping with that of comic books, there is scarcely any more reason to think an imagined "nature's way" would be any more "the human way" than it is in comics. That which various social groups have, from time to time, thought of as their "emancipation" has not always taken account of its non-human natural consequences. Or even seen why it should. An important question here might then be one about the value, truth and authenticity of nature – and where it comes from (assuming it exists at all). Does nature have its own, pre-discursive, value, truth and authenticity – or are all of these things nothing but "discursive effects" or "cultural inscriptions"?

Soper makes an interesting comment upon this when she says that "the one thing that is not 'natural' is nature." Of course, we, I hope, understand what she means here. "Nature" is a human idea (and so a human invention) expressed in human language. (This makes it "cultural".) It is not, as it were, nature's own idea, an official, canonised understanding, implicit and inherent throughout the natural world. But it also occurs to me, at least, that this might just be begging the question. Is human language 'natural'? Are human stories, narratives and fictions that are made of that language 'natural'? If a bird sqwalked in a forest, as I hear many birds do of a normal morning on my walks, then no one would for a second question that something 'natural' was occurring. So why do so if a human being 'sqwalks' with some particular sense? To say that "nature is a human idea" is simply to say that in the understanding of a human being "nature", as an idea, functions in a particular way or as part of a particular set of relations. It is the human being's own manipulations of itself within its surroundings by means of ideas, something which is part of its own

naturally-endowed process for doing so and so surviving as what it is. So does that mean "nature is not natural"? Only if you think nature needs to "speak for itself", something which is patently absurd. Nature, in fact, speaks with many voices, all of them diverse and specific ones rather than with a unique canonical voice of its own. Perhaps this is what then leads Soper to talk about "the politically contested nature of 'nature' in our own times."

Soper in fact says that she wishes to "reconcile" the naturalist and postmodernist positions, giving full due to arguments about "cultural construction" yet whilst also defending "a realist position as offering the only responsible basis from which to argue for any kind of political change whether in our dealings with nature or anything else." Her point here seems to be that "nature", obviously in one sense a cultural construction, a human linguistic invention, is also a pre-discursive material realm. Her concern here appears to be that if we do not absolutely concede nature's pre-discursive material reality then all we would be doing is constantly relying on "particular personal preference or prejudice" instead. Apparently, she considers that undesirable. This, in turn, is based upon a recognition that how nature is observed, imagined or made use of "can have very definite political effects". Presumably, then, arguing for something "real", material and pre-discursive is a rhetorical move and amounts to the argument that, in discussing nature, we are not merely playing with humanity's mutable words. There are material consequences. In fact, Soper's argument is exactly about that nexus where materiality and imaginative invention interact, converge and become consequential.

But there is a problem for Soper has a tendency, and she would imagine it simply a human tendency which she is repeating, to imagine that "nature" is "everything which is not human and distinguished from the work of humanity." This immediately OPPOSES nature

to culture (which in this understanding is human, despite the fact that many, if not all, life forms clearly also have cultures) and engages in that process which attempts to carve out for humanity its own special niche to the side of nature where the humans cannot be contaminated by its uncultured ways. Nature then almost simply becomes "otherness" in such thinking. Soper, however, insists there are discourses in which such a distinction "remains indispensable" and argues that "it is correct to insist that 'nature' is the idea through which we conceptualise what is 'other' to ourselves." Her point is not purely abstract, however, for in and through it she is making an argument about the uses of nature in discourse. "Nature as other" has many possible uses – and not all for the same people. If nature is "other" it can be argued by an ecologist to be something for us to get back to in a narrative in which we have technologically advanced and alienated ourselves from this otherness and so strayed from it (perhaps even in fact further making it "other"). A return to Eden might then be prescribed. But it can also be used by a rampant capitalist as an argument for why it is then perfectly fine to simply exploit it until it is gone. It is not us so why should we care about it?

Of course, just because we can rhetorically make use of the idea that nature is a world external to the human and its works, it does not mean that this is the material situation. If words, ideas and narratives are things human beings use to manipulate their experience in the world for the pursuance of their purposes or desires, then it is easily foreseeable that this can be (indeed, I seem to have made the case in previous books, after others, that it must be) an imaginative task. Imagination, however, has no non-imaginative, pre-discursive measure by which its "accuracy" or "reality" can be judged. The thing about something being "pre-discursive" – whether measures or nature – is that you, by very definition, then seem to rule yourself out from being able to talk about it. It is what, in past theological and biblical circles I used to move in, would be talked about as a

Bultmannian “thatness”, a bare, undiscussable factuality. (In the case of Rudolf Bultmann, to whom I am referring, it was the bare “thatness” of Jesus of Nazareth that was being referred to as Bultmann sheared away all past access to anything said of or about him using a literary technique known as Form Criticism which produced an existential Jesus of no historical detail whatsoever. So all we could know, in Bultmann’s understanding, was that Jesus had existed – but nothing else.) In the case of nature, calling it “pre-discursive” might also seem to lead in a similar direction: nature exists but you can’t say a damn thing about it whilst it is simply “pre-discursive” – and that even whilst it simultaneously seems that, actually, you are slap bang in the middle of it and breathing it in and out on a constant basis – meaning, at least, that nature must be both what you are not (on the “nature is the non-human” thesis) and also that which you are within as a participant.

We can, however, attempt to personalise the subject by making the nature to be discussed “human nature”. Here we seem to stray into essentialist territory in that the point of such rhetoric appears to be “what makes the human, human”. Soper informs us that talk about “human nature” is “often used to emphasise our difference from ‘natural’ species” and that often inevitably boils down to us being uniquely rational and moral. Consequently, behaving rationally and morally is “to be human” (and “exceptional” for that fact) but not acting rationally or morally is to become “feral” or “an animal”. This paints nature as a barbarous place without either order or justice (as if humanity had both) and Soper informs us that philosophers such as John Stuart Mill have taken this lesson from the distinction, arguing that “following nature” is consequently inherently immoral (if, in Mill’s mind, this is still what nature was anyway). In this thinking, “instinct” or “impulse” is far inferior to “reason” and one is natural whereas the other is a uniquely human development or endowment. In an understanding in which rationality and morality are so revered, “the natural” is consequently vilified as ghastly, degenerate and

abhorrent. According to Mill, “Nature cannot but counsel that which is criminal” even though, according to the earlier testimony of Lynn Margulis, unintelligent bacteria have been far more positively consequential for life on earth than human beings will ever be.

This impinges upon territory I want to occupy myself in this discussion for I openly seek to proffer nature “as a value”. If that value is to be “criminality” or “degeneracy” then I will find an ally in John Stuart Mill. But, of course, it isn’t (as it wasn’t for Moore either and his “way of the wood”). Yet such judgments as Mill made and Soper highlighted do lead us to ask of nature if it is a warrant or guide or licensing authority in regard to behaviour. In my own mind I am quite clear that it is not. No one can offer up “nature” as a reason or excuse for any course of action in any circumstance. If we are so tied to nature that we must simply “act naturally” then we cannot be blamed and if we have “freedom of choice” then the action will fall back on us rather than a nature that precedes us. And what if we further concede that human beings may defy their imagined nature or diversify culturally? Can you blame nature because something in nature could defy nature? If nature is anything then IT IS NOT CONVENTIONAL and therefore it seems rather more about freedom of action than it does about following rules or laws you have no choice but to follow. A consequence of nature being self-organisatory is that that which has powers (or receives consequences) of self-organisation must organise itself regardless of overarching interpretive metanarratives or imaginative reasons or morals. This makes the notion of a “crime against nature” a rhetorical one for, whilst actions can certainly have very destructive natural effects we might wish to avoid, it makes no sense to talk about nature as a whole (even in and through its parts) committing crime against itself. Nature has neither codes of practice nor laws of behaviour. It simply has consequences.

The matter of “human nature”, however, introduces other subjects such as “conscience” which some might imagine “the voice of nature within us” – as Soper puts it after Rousseau. Then there are various notions of nature as a whole as “set in place” (either by a deity or just as a fact) and in or through which our “nature” is meant to shine to our own (or even the whole’s) ultimate advantage. There have been various Enlightenment and Post-Enlightenment movements which emphasise “progress” or “improvement” (always, of course, coming through the human in interaction with, or in spite of, nature as a whole) but these have taken place against an industrialised and “civilised”, human-created environment which it has been easy for some to sharply contrast with nature when left to its own devices. This fact begs the question of what “progress” or “improvement” actually are and who is imagined party to them in a world in which it is easy to imagine such human activity alienates its inhabitants from a world thought more “natural” (particularly if one is possessed of a mind one might call “Romantic”). This, however, in the making of the distinction, promotes the idea of human industrial progress as bad for nature – and as something to be contrasted with nature – even as Kate Soper reports in her book that:

“*An Enlightenment conception of our ‘nature’ as ‘improvable’ has been of critical importance to the promotion of the ideals of equality, justice and freedom which have come to ground the Western conception of progress. The (alas, continuing) horrors of the twentieth century have severely dented the faith in the ameliorative powers of ‘civilisation’, but in a sense this itself speaks to a presumption that our ‘human nature’ is such as to allow and require us to act in ways that transcend ‘nature’: to act in accordance with justice and to observe a system of rights.*”

This, however, seems more about idealism than the materiality of the natural world. If nature simply is, as Soper has herself simply required, then why is that a worse model for,

or impetus to, behaviour than wholly invented and arbitrary ideas of justice and rights (which are often simply imposed in ways that seem coercive, unethical, and, by the by, examples of human exceptionalism)? (Even a social reformer like the aforementioned John Stuart Mill advocated "benevolent despotism".) What rights does a tree, a fox or a virus have and how do they come by them? What can we learn from that? What they would appear to have is forms of life (one of many, various, and seemingly increasingly diverse ways) which are not subject to moral judgment or rational justification. A tree acts like a tree; a fox acts like a fox; a virus acts like a virus. And the world of nature (perhaps now better described as "The Wild") goes on its nonjudgmental, immoralist way. This description, however, falls into the description of nature Soper assigns to "the Romantic": "an essentially innocent and benevolent power" which she says has played a role in numerous eras of cultural emancipation as an aspect of a greater "nature libertarianism" which appears as "wholesome salvation from cultural decadence". The trouble with that, however, is that that is partly what the Nazis, the actual historical Nazis, thought they were doing too. All that rhetoric they had about "the Fatherland" (which the German philosopher Martin Heidegger apparently fell for all too easily) was actually very nature-specific and earthy – Deutschland earth, that is. Talk of what is "natural", of course, is also easily accommodated to persecuting those not thought so. And that, as we know from history, can very easily just turn into designating other people as "other", people you have very rhetorically rendered that "other" by your own politicised (or eugenic) rhetoric.

This is just one reason why I totally reject the rhetoric of nature as "the other". Nature is not an opposite or something opposed to the human. Rather, the human is simply and absolutely a part of nature. And, since we are nature, we must learn from nature in regard to what we are. I do not think this means constantly contrasting the human, and human activity, with nature, however, for that is to assume a rhetorical distinction as if it were

absolute. There are uses for that distinction – as in when Diogenes and the Cynics distinguish nomos (law or custom) from physis (nature) in their cultural campaign against the illegitimate artificialities of civilisation – but that is to make a rhetorical point and to point out the imagined failings of civilisation for its own sake exactly in contrast to a nature it determines not to be. In that case, I am arguing things are more complicated than this and it is to be asked if anything humanly cultural is not also natural or of nature since it is done in nature by natural beings acting from their nature. Diogenes went through the marketplace with his lamp in broad daylight "looking for a human being" and the apparent point of this anecdote is that the civilised people he saw about him were not regarded by him as this because they had forgotten their nature and, in their civilised ways, had become out of phase with nature – which Cynics took as their explicit guide. Yet "civilisation" is not opposite to nature. It is merely the natural differently (i.e. culturally) actualised. It may certainly be argued back and forth how beneficial, and to whom, this actualisation turns out to be. But something, by dint of being cultural, is not thereby automatically anti or non-natural. This is exactly where talk of "naturecultures" (such as that by Donna Haraway) I used in my previous book *Imagining / Queer / Anarchy* fits in.

This puts the Cynics' rhetorical nomos-physis distinction in question. It argues that nature and culture are not so easily, or so absolutely, opposed. This might sound surprising coming from me as well since I have been a fanboy of Diogenes since forever. You will see reference to him and the Cynics more widely in everything I write. In Cynicism, in fact, I see a proto-anarchism as some others have too. But if presented with the argument that nature and culture are opposites I now find myself in a position where I must refuse it. I am much more convinced by the arguments of someone such as Donna Haraway who talks about "naturecultures" and, in so doing, unites and fuses these two ideas rather than seeing them as necessarily repellent to each other. In short, nature is culturally expressed

and any culture must come from a natural source in the end, becoming then a natural expression. What purposes these things serve is, of course, an entirely separate question as well as being an entirely valid one. But we will probably not be able to put the blame for anything we find wrong or deficient on either “culture” or “nature” simply put as a result. Diogenes in the marketplace wanted to find a certain sort of person he preferred and thought of as a better kind of person. He identified that person with things he imagined more natural and less artificial or customary. In doing so, he took what he observed from nature and used that as a guide. I argue that we should do exactly the same thing but that a strict nature-culture or nomos-physis distinction never held any intellectual worth in absolute terms. These must now be integrated – as must human beings be integrated back into nature – and we must go from there.

What I seek in and through all of this, then, is a particular discourse about nature – one that includes naturecultures, a nature that is always cultural in and through cultures that cannot but be the expression of nature(s). (Beavers build dams, birds build nests, badgers build setts, humans build cities. None is more or less natural or cultural than the others – albeit they no doubt have very different motives, consequences and effects and we can always ask questions about these in any case.) In this we are never talking about nature as “reality as it is”. All the points about the human intellect being imaginative and everything being “fiction” (or, in this context, “cultural”) that I have made many, many times before still hold and have not been abandoned. The question, however, is to ask what nature is and what it is specifically if imagined as a (rhetorical) value. Here what we absolutely must not do, however, as Soper’s historical commentary on nature’s usage vis-a-vis sex, gender and women in What is Nature? reminds us, is regard nature AS AN AUTHORITY. In seeking to ask the question of nature as a value I am not engaging in the exercise of looking for a better authority – or even any authority. The value in and of nature I am talking about is

one we rhetorically construct with, in and through nature for ourselves as the consequence of our experience in, and as part of, that nature. I suppose, as a consequence, that nature could have as many values as there are participants in it. (And it is important there to note we are participants in nature rather than observers of it.) But I think the better point is that the elucidation of such values is an example of participation in it. It is in OUR nature to create useful fictions about things and there could be no more important fiction than that fiction we articulate about nature.

In starting to create one of my own, then, I begin where I began thinking about anarchy many years ago now – which is with thinking of anarchy as like nature. In order to illustrate this, I will list some anarchist quotes which I shall contextualise afterwards:

"*We must live today, right now, and it is OUTSIDE of all laws, all rules, all theories – even anarchist ones – that we want to give in to our pity, our outbursts, our sweetness, our rage, our instincts – with the pride of being ourselves.*" (Zo d'Axa)

"*I am a fanatic lover of liberty ... the only kind of liberty that is worth the name, liberty that consists in the full development of all the material, intellectual, and moral powers that are latent in each person; liberty recognizes no restrictions other than those determined by the laws of our own individual nature.*" (Mikhail Bakunin)

"*Out of the free collaboration of everyone, thanks to the spontaneous combination of men in accordance with their needs and sympathies, from the bottom up, from the simple to the complex, starting from the most immediate interests and working towards the most general, there will arise a social organization, the goal of which will be the greatest well-*

being and fullest freedom of all ... Such a society of free human beings, such a society of friends, is Anarchy." (Errico Malatesta)

"*The basic anarchist premise is that human flourishing is best achieved by free individuals who consensually collaborate in a non-authoritarian society.*" (Carl Tobias Frayne)

"*Anarchists are not simply opposed to the state; they are opposed to representation of all kinds. As such, anarchists believe that people ought to act for themselves when they want something done.*" ("Direct Action" as described in the "Key Terms" section of The Continuum Companion to Anarchism edited by Ruth Kinna)

"*...We have seen that species, naturally and in accordance with a primordial fate, must, in order to survive, destroy other species, but that the individuals of each species only massacre each other when subsistence is lacking.*

We believe that the struggle within the human species can cease, that this merciless war to which the name competition has been given, can be brought to an end, because we know that mechanization and intensive farming can provide humans, all humans, not only with what is necessary, but even a superfluity, and that once this is so the struggles between them will no longer have any reason for being.

In order to reach this state of affairs, to bring the men around us – the religious, patriots, the mad, voters, alcoholics, etc. – to a normal vision of existence, there are only two methods: curing or killing. Curing the ill and killing the incurable is the sole justice in conformity with natural laws. Educating man, awakening their consciences and reason

through propaganda, and applying the death penalty to unevolvable vermin, to all those who live of death like crows, who live on carrion.

Impelled by the implacable logic of facts, we will suppress the crimes of society by crime against society." (Mauricius, "L'Apologie du Crime", in Editions des Causeries Populaires, 1910)

Now I do not necessarily endorse, or not endorse, any of those quotes personally. But together they do make a point about nature – in that they imagine anarchy to be an all-consuming, all-encompassing, affair without partisanship. They are talking about anarchy but, in my mind, they could just as equally be imagining nature too. They, amongst several other things, some of which I have mentioned in the pages of my discussion above, then lead me to discuss not "nature" going forward but THE WILD.

Nature, for me, is and must be THE WILD. Why the wild? Because it is only in the wild where life receives its freedom (not least from moral coercion). The wild is not fluffy and cuddly, however, in case you think this naively romantic imagery. The wild can be harsh, cruel, merciless, vicious and completely uncaring (for that is its nature). But whilst that is true, it is also true to say that the wild is not systematic exploitation. It is not a world of forced economic and political and moral relations even if it does insist upon physical realities and necessities. It is a place of direct action and acting for yourself (or yourselves). It is a place of consequence and of autonomy, agency and free association. It is a place of self-determination and self-actualisation. It is a place for being oneself, going one's own way and being "so of its own" (ziran). The wild is not "civilisation", and should not be imagined as such, for it is civilisation's constant threat of change and a shadow over it portending transformation. The wild does not privilege one culture or species but

provides the basis for many and diversifying examples of such things. Nature as a value is THE WILD.

In the wild there is no authority. What there is is the imperative of life itself, that self-organisatory and self-responsible thing I have discussed before. The wild, in one sense, is simply everything living its life (and, inevitably, dying its death) simultaneously. The wild is a constant unfolding of life, time and space and its consequences. This is radically open-ended and radically free of moral prescription. What can happen may happen. In a sense, then, the value in “the wild” is TO KEEP THINGS THIS WAY or to have a prejudice for such wild liberty. The enemy of the wild, consequently, is centralising coercion or exploitation and this is why human beings especially come into focus as beings with power to enslave and destroy species and ecosystems and, frankly, to interfere and presume to control. (Nature is the power of destruction as well as of creation and holds no moral prejudice either way. This might motivate the insight that human beings can easily become nature’s alienation from itself in and through itself. It also makes any proclaimed “benevolence” in human coercion utterly irrelevant.) Alan Moore thought “the way of the wood” was non-interference and I think that the way we honour that notion is by not seeing the wild as things to be commercialised or exploited or industrialised. (John Cage utters “You will only make matters worse”!) The wild should be recognised as a greater phenomenon than ourselves, one we share with all biota which together create a habitable biosphere. The wild is our context as anarchy is our context and both have ethical examples to teach us and ethical lessons to give.

What might those be? I don’t really want to be prescriptive about it. That is not a cop out. Its an example of what I am talking about by making nature’s value “the wild”. You must do the working out for yourself, make your own way, forge your own path, create your

own life and its own values, live your own consequences (and everything else's). That is precisely "the wild". The wild is the interdependence of independent things. The wild is the reality of diversity. The wild is a free network of relationships or a concatenation of co-becoming on a journey through time and space. The wild is that which exists transforming itself interactively. The wild is things being what they are. The wild is freedom from overarching deliberation. The wild is the possibility of, and struggle for, existence beyond coercion. As such, it cannot be prescribed. It should not be prescribed. It should be lived out and participated in and created. Continuously.

"The wild", then, is very much a participatory and consequentialist understanding of nature as a value that seeks to interpret nature's manner of operation. I imagine it a potentially endless intertwining of actions and energies, of wills and desires, that is both living things acting in self-organising ways for themselves but also, quite remarkably, in ways that produce an overall environment, situation, condition or effect that enables and maintains the whole. This is NOT an effect that is bound to happen in the sense that the effect is not arbitrary but consequent. Things could very easily be different and with much different consequences. If the arrangement of these elements was arbitrarily changed, or changed spontaneously too much, then a different outcome would emerge, one which might wipe all this away. Lynn Margulis' insight that life acts to preserve itself (and not just by itself but as a community of life in tandem, in and through all kinds of symbiotic entanglements and alliances) is then very important as is the notion that life acts (autopoietically) in its own interest. Here that things are absolutely NOT organised from above by some inviolable law or guiding divine hand is of utmost importance for the argument is that radical self-organisatory freedom is what makes the wild the place, and the phenomenon, that it is.

The apparent stability of life on our planet over hundreds of millions of years has then been achieved, using political language, in and through an autonomous freedom and a liberty of agency in living things. It has produced a profound naturalness that is exactly “wild” without the need for any overarching desire or the application of any controlling will or arbitrary reason. It has been based on independence AND interdependence in a situation where the two necessarily fit together and co-exist, an order and a chaos of being, things and events in relationship. Nature, the wild, is active. It is not passive stuff. It, in its myriad parts, has interests to pursue and consequence to both survive and to create. One can, in fact, imagine that the wild’s justice, its ethical context, is simply CONSEQUENCE. This is to say that living things act in a freedom that is devoid of overarching moral imperative but not without after the fact material consequentiality – for materiality simply is consequential. There, “Do what thou wilt” – as Aleister Crowley was fond of saying (meaning not strict selfishness that disregards the consequences for others but aligning one’s actions with one's deepest, most authentic self and contributing to the greater good) – but do so knowing that every action or inaction has its own consequences. These may be entirely unpredictable and unfathomable – there is nothing that says life should be an algorithm human reason can decipher and harness, a mathematical puzzle to be solved and used to one’s advantage. But they are authentic. And authenticity, as we have discussed earlier, brings us back to things which are “so of its own”, spontaneous, genuine and similarly authentic. Everything must reckon with consequences, as Moore’s Swamp Thing seemed in the end to conclude, and consequences appear as the wild’s way of teaching that anything with will, desire or power of action can do as it will – but that’s never the end of the story. In the end, then, the wild might simply be a story told to say “be what you are” and live what that brings in a world of consequence.

3. Green Anarchy and Alienating Civilisation

Anarchy and Nature

In 1978 the academic journal *Nomos* (the yearbook of the American Society for Political and Legal Philosophy), published by Harvard University Press, published its 19th yearly edition on the subject of "Anarchism." Contained within this volume were consequently several essays on anarchism in relation to broad political or philosophical subjects. One such was Donald McIntosh's essay "The Dimensions of Anarchy" from which I want to quote now in a section of that essay in which he gives what he imagines as foundational and definitional content in relation to anarchy, anarchism and anarchists:

"*A. The Need for Government*

The term "anarchy" is often taken to mean "lack of government," but this is a mistake. Almost all anarchists believe and have believed in government, and for good reason. The need for government seems incontrovertible, and indeed the very starting point of political theory.

If humans are to have any better than an animal existence, living in caves and eating roots and berries, they must live in communities in which activity is organized and coordinated by both general rules and specific directives. Humanity itself requires cooperative social activity, and this in turn requires government. Just as atoms, solar systems, and galaxies have "laws" which govern their behavior, so must human communities. Otherwise they could not exist. Lack of government is not anarchy but chaos.

B. Nondeliberate Government

By "government" is here meant primarily the deliberate or conscious regulation of social action: the formation of a decision by a person or persons as to how people are to behave, which is communicated and obeyed. However, in a more extended sense it is possible to speak of the nondeliberate "government" of social action. There are two types.

First, social groups are typically and characteristically "governed" by a set of informal social norms, which are not the product of deliberate decisions but instead arise spontaneously out of the interactions of the group members. These informal norms organize and regulate a great deal of the life of every social grouping, from the simplest tribe or street-corner gang to the most elaborate formal organization. The effectiveness of these rules depends first on their internalization—their inner acceptance by the group members—and second on the apparently universal tendency of the group members to enforce the rules on each other spontaneously, via various forms of coercion. I have elsewhere called this form of regulation "social control."

In the second form of nondeliberate regulation, which can be called 'automatic government', the regulation occurs as an unplanned aggregate result of the unilateral decisions of the actors. Classical economic theory envisions such a process. Each actor acts from personal motives (e.g. economic self-interest) without thought of the relation of the action to the overall pattern of the interaction. Given certain kinds of motives (e.g. a prudent desire to maximise profit) and a certain setting (e.g. a free market) the net resultant will be the regulation of economic interaction by certain 'laws' (e.g. which set prices, allocate production and distribution, etc.).

Many anarchists have been uneasy abut any kind of deliberate government, and sought to rely as much as possible on some variation of the two nondeliberate forms. Almost without exception, however, they are forced to recognise that deliberate government cannot altogether be dispensed with. Even the most close-knit system of social control, as a small traditionally oriented tribe, where all social behavior is regulated by an elaborate normative system, finds itself faced from time to time with the need for deliberate governmental decisions, and, as I shall argue later, automatic government can exist only, if at all, within a framework of deliberate government.

C. Anarchy and the State of Nature

Nozick has used 'anarchy' as synonymous with the 'state of nature', as the idea was understood by a number of seventeenth and eighteenth century thinkers, especially Locke. Locke defines the state of nature as "Men living together, according to reason, without a common superior on earth with authority to judge between them.' It is true that a good deal of government occurs in Locke's state of nature. The law of nature 'governs' human behavior, not in a deliberate way, but through the force with which it operates within the minds of people. From the 'self-evidence' of this law of nature, its divine origin, its universal acceptance, and the general willingness to enforce it spontaneously, a sociologist would likely conclude that Locke's law of nature is a set of social norms. Operating through its acceptance, this normative system... governs the state of nature, but, Locke feels, not very well. It needs to be reinforced by deliberate government.

There are two stages in Locke's theory of the establishment of such a government. First the members of society agree unanimously to form an association which has the authority to execute the law of nature. Second, this association, by majority vote, establishes a system

of government. In these terms, anarchy lies, not in the state of nature, but precisely between these two stages.

An anarchic society is a group of people who have, by unanimous agreement, formed together into an authoritative body, but have not established, and do not intend to establish, any 'common superior on earth to judge between them'. Instead, all governmental action must, like the original formative decision, be the outcome of the unanimous agreement of the undifferentiated whole.

D. A Definition of Government

In political theory, the term 'government' usually refers to the deliberate kind... A strict definition of 'government' can be obtained by generalising the following special case: let A and B be two actors, each with two options, a1 and a2, and b1 and b2 respectively. This generates a field of interaction containing four possible states: a1b1, a1b2, a2b1 and a2b2. If the interaction is ungoverned, the interaction occurs in one stage. A and B each choose unilaterally one of their options, and the result is one of the four possible interactions. If the interaction is governed, however, it occurs in two stages, and involves two levels of choice. First, some chooses not an option but a state of the field (an option pair), thus prescribing an option for each actor. For example, someone chooses a1b2: a1 for A and b2 for B. This someone can be A or B, or A and B jointly (by agreement), or a third party, C. Second, after this governmental decision A and B individually (unilaterally) choose the option prescribed by the governmental decision. If they do not so choose, the government is not 'effective' (does not occur).

E. A Definition of "Anarchy"

In terms of the formulation above, anarchy can be defined by two characteristics: first, the governmental decision is the product of a unanimous joint agreement among all the governed; second, the choice of the governed, whether to comply or not to comply with this governmental decision, is not compelled or even influenced by any political authority. The meaning of the second proviso, and its relation to the first, will emerge in the course of the discussion.

Anarchy thus takes its place alongside the traditional three forms of government: monarchy, aristocracy (or oligarchy), and democracy. If the nondeliberate forms are included, we have a sixfold typology of government, as follows:

	Form of government	*who governs*
	Automatic government	*nobody*
nondeliberate	*Social Control*	*social norms*
	Monarchy	*one*
	Aristocracy	*a few*
deliberate	*Democracy*	*a majority*
	Anarchy	*everyone*

In practice, anarchic government is by no means unknown. Many small informal groups make decisions via a rule of unanimity, and at the other extreme an alliance between two states fulfils the definition exactly, for the signatory parties unanimously decide how their

relations are to be regulated, and then proceed individually and without compulsion from any common political authority to put (or not to put) the provisions of the treaty into effect. (This assumes that international law is not backed by any political authority.)

Anarchy is nevertheless a very difficult form to make work, especially if the regulation involved is at all extensive. Decisions are extremely hard to arrive at, and compliance is uncertain, precisely because of its two defining features. Where anarchy is most effective, in small informal groups (e.g. communes), is where it is most likely to be transmuted into less than unanimous and politically authoritative government. The question arises: What principles could possibly justify an attempt to adopt such a difficult, ineffective, and unstable form of government?"

McIntosh's essay is a curious piece, one perhaps typical of the political academic who treats anarchy as "just another politics". As such, their acquaintance with it seems almost entirely in terms of book knowledge as related to liberal political theory and they read it as a theory to be considered like, and alongside, any other (section e above) rather than as something to be inhabited by or participated in. Consequently, there is much to criticise here in regards to the conclusions McIntosh comes to.

Not the least of these criticisms is that McIntosh insists government is "incontrovertibly" necessary and even goes so far as to suggest that "Almost all anarchists believe and have believed in government" for this reason. This claim (based on my historical knowledge of actual anarchists which is, at least, not trivial) seems ridiculous to me but it is consequent on McIntosh's own definition of terms which I will come to below. McIntosh often seems to mean something more akin to "organisation" or "cooperation" when he talks about government, regardless of what he says he means, and it needs to be pointed out that

these aren't the same things. One does not need government (which involves institutions and certain configurations of power, it seems to me) to create organised social activity or social cooperation. Just walk into any wood or forest where plants, trees, microbes and fungi have all worked out how to socially cooperate without a shred of government involved. Neither does one need rules, directives or dictats or to require "obedience" (as nature further demonstrates). The point to be made here would be that even if you did need these things HOW the organisation or cooperation takes place is of seminal interest to the anarchist and makes an actual difference in reality. McIntosh, in his essay, appears to have convinced himself that "lack of government is chaos" where he sees anarchy as a form of order. He is not historically alone in that (consider, for example, Anselme Bellegarrigue or P-J Proudhon). But in my imaginary of wild anarchy, set out above, I disagree with both that assessment and that order and chaos are in anarchy opposed.

McIntosh imagines multiple constructions of something he calls "government". The first is "deliberate government" which is his primary meaning for the term (see sections b and d above). This is "the deliberate or conscious regulation of social action: the formation of a decision by a person or persons as to how people are to behave, which is communicated and obeyed." Clearly, this may involve some form of coercion even if that coercion is attempted to be justified by means of ethical reason or imagined justice or necessity. This understanding of government is the idea that a person or persons may regulate the behaviour of others on a general basis – in theory even without their consent – and expect (or, ultimately, coerce) their obedience. It is the basic construction "someone decides and everyone else is expected to follow the decision".

In addition to this, McIntosh imagines a couple of forms of "non-deliberate government". These turn out to be various social realities such as "informal social norms" or habitual

behaviours in social interaction which result in what McIntosh calls “automatic government” or the de facto creation of “laws” of social interaction. It is not clear, however, that we should imagine this sort of thing as “government” when, in the “deliberate” version of the same, “decisions” are involved and “obedience” is expected or required. That people form habits in and between themselves or learn social behaviours does not seem to me immediately “governmental” and suggests a sort of catch all overreach in McIntosh’s terminology which, in his logic, must terminate in the necessity of “government” as an *a priori*. This suspicion is further aroused when it turns out McIntosh basically thinks the non-deliberate forms of government ultimately rely upon, or require, the more deliberate form in the end. This flies in the face of various anarchists’ organisational proposals (and they are “organisational” rather than “governmental”) in which “informal social norms”, which are not thought of as “government” since they are usually considered entirely voluntary and participatory, are put forward as alternatives to exactly “government” more deliberately constructed in McIntosh’s terms. One needs to ask what anarchists are seeking to get rid of when they wish to replace authoritarian leadership (which in my terms is exactly “government”) with something else and what they imagine the relationship is of one person to another. It seems anarchist orthodoxy to imagine that “voluntary” is a near uniform component of such an imaginary and that will always put any imaginary of “government” in deliberative terms in eternal question and find the “anarchist” and the “governmental” in opposition.

McIntosh has a further section in which he discusses “Anarchy and the State of Nature” and this, as a general topic, is of obvious interest to me given my earlier concerns in this book. McIntosh himself, being a liberal political academic, understandably takes the discussion down the line of Enlightenment political thought, focusing, contemporaneously, on Robert Nozick but more especially on John Locke, that well

known colonialist and justifier and extender of the power of the already powerful. This thinking is one which seeks to make “anarchy” into a “law of nature” where its character as “law” is the important thing for a scholar who clearly favours order (which in his mind is brought about by law) over chaos (which is lawlessness). Consequently, nature itself must be characterised by laws. It is here definitively NOT “the wild” as I have earlier tried to imagine it.

So we get, for example, Locke’s definition of the “state of nature”: “Men living together, according to reason, without a common superior on earth with authority to judge between them.” In this thinking, according to McIntosh, this becomes something inherent in human minds and relations, ”a set of social norms” (which he has already argued can be a form of government) and they are presented as a “normative system”, a matter of law, universality, generality, and ordained by gods with the requisite enforcement. Yet all this too ends up needing “deliberate government” as previously defined! It seems that even “natural law” or “anarchy as a state of nature” needs the deliberate coercions of human beings to make sure it is followed and it is clear that McIntosh can in fact see little else but the need for deliberative human political organisation in his conception of political theory. As such, it comes off as a form of Hobbesian authoritarianism: human beings need to be made to do things (based on someone’s decision, that someone not necessarily being themselves) lest they do what they like (which would be a chaotic disaster). There is no consideration here that EVERYTHING that happens in nature is “acting according to a state of nature” or that nature might be exactly wild chaos – but be none the worse for that.

Politically, McIntosh ends by defining anarchy and he does it in what seems to me to be a strange way. He imagines anarchy as a matter of groups coming to unanimous decisions

that do not involve coercion from imagined political authorities. This seems like he is trying to accommodate the “deliberate” politics he has discussed earlier to anarchist ways. Or, put it another way, he ends up making anarchy a form of his “deliberate government”, the thing he has seemingly argued throughout ends up being necessary anyway! This might be nice and neat in the context of his essay on anarchism in an issue of a journal that is also about anarchism but it is being extremely choosy with the evidence. At the very least, for example, he might refer to anarchism in these terms (since it is a human ideology) but not to anarchy (which is a putative state of nature). The former here talks about how humans order and operate human society. The second is a reflection on material reality itself as a context or situation. McIntosh likely has not considered this wider context for the subject and, in that, he is like many others. But this, from my perspective, is exactly the issue at hand and I don’t wish to artificially remove human beings from their undeniable material context in lived reality as if this could be done at all. The thing about “the wild” is exactly that it is all encompassing. There’s no escaping it.

“The wild”, however, is often depicted as the dark contrast, the flip side of the coin, to human-instituted order. For McIntosh, politics, including anarchy, is a matter of how humans make ordered what nature has chaotically disordered – and which would remain so without us, the potential agents of order. But is this how the wild (or, for that matter, human society) seems to you? There are certainly those who have NOT seen it this way.

One of those is the American Henry David Thoreau, a writer who combined political independence (to the extent that he inspired anarchist Emma Goldman) and a passionate love for the wild. We see these twin concerns if we meander through his collected works and, in this case, I am going to focus on two essays, the well known “On The Duty of Civil Disobedience” and the lesser known “Walking”. The former essay here starts with the

truism “That government is best which governs least” and that sets the tone for what is to follow here in my brief interaction with Thoreau’s thought. Politically, this is marked by the aforementioned penchant for independence which bristles at the suggestion a human being should “resign his conscience to a legislator” not least because they have a conscience by natural endowment, something Thoreau respects for just such a reason. Consequently, he concludes:

“*It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right.*”

Thoreau goes on here to point out that those who have “undue respect for the law” find themselves one day as fodder for the unscrupulous man of power since they so easily fall into line. But what Thoreau says (in a saying which Goldman herself specifically quotes in one of her anarchist essays) is:

“*O for a man who is a man, and, as my neighbor says, has a bone in his back which you cannot pass your hand through!*”

“Men”, according to Thoreau, are not then those who obsequiously acquiesce in their own servitude neither do they concern themselves with majorities and minorities when all that matters is “the majority of one” that is constituted by your own ability to decide matters for yourself. Thoreau seems to imagine this “living according to nature” and it does indeed seem the most natural thing in the world to him that people would use their natural endowments to decide their courses of action and how to carry them out for themselves. If the state should take a different view (in a thought later echoed by David

Graeber in his book *Direct Action*) well then that is its business. It essentially changes nothing, as Thoreau points out here:

"*the state never intentionally confronts a man's sense, intellectual or moral, but only his body, his senses. It is not armed with superior wit or honesty, but with superior physical strength. I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion. Let us see who is the strongest. What force has a multitude? They only can force me who obey a higher law than I. They force me to become like themselves. I do not hear of men being forced to live this way or that by masses of men. What sort of life were that to live? When I meet a government which says to me, 'Your money or your life,' why should I be in haste to give it my money? It may be in a great strait, and not know what to do: I cannot help that. It must help itself; do as I do. It is not worth the while to snivel about it. I am not responsible for the successful working of the machinery of society. I am not the son of the engineer. I perceive that, when an acorn and a chestnut fall side by side, the one does not remain inert to make way for the other, but both obey their own laws, and spring and grow and flourish as best they can, till one, perchance, overshadows and destroys the other. If a plant cannot live according to nature, it dies; and so a man.*"

Thoreau's preference would be for a polity made up of people like these, those who do "only what belongs to himself and to the hour", but he does not imagine he lives amongst it. So his attitude is as one aloof from the machinations of human society as he imagines himself part of a larger, freer world. The top of his pyramid is not the state but the human being, the human singularity (a term I take from Saul Newman's postanarchism. See the next chapter). In Thoreau's mind natural born human beings tell states what they will do or concede and not the other way around. They certainly never lose, much less give up, their independence, their faculty for self-organisation and self-actualisation.

It is my belief that this political view of Thoreau's is directly relatable to, is perhaps most likely consequent on, his appreciation of wild nature. For example, he begins the essay "Walking" by saying:

"*I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil, — to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. I wish to make an extreme statement, if so I may make an emphatic one, for there are enough champions of civilization: the minister and the school-committee, and every one of you will take care of that.*"

What follows is not so much an essay about walking but, rather, one about what one is walking in and amongst – and Thoreau speaks as an enthusiastic walker (much like Nietzsche, although he also had health reasons for his prodigious hours on foot in the wild) who needs "four hours a day at least... sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields". For Thoreau, however, this is not what today we might call "therapy" but "is itself the enterprise and adventure of the day", a task in itself, something constituting "the tan and callus of experience". Thoreau describes this experience as one which takes him out of a civilising atmosphere and immediately (or so he hopes) into one altogether more chthonic, earthy, unadministrated. "What business have I in the woods, if I am thinking of something out of the woods?" he asks. This involves "forget(ing) all my obligations to society." It involves getting away from the "tame and cheap" that he imagines "man's improvements" have amounted to. And here we stumble upon something of a natural principle for Thoreau:

"*I believe that there is a subtle magnetism in Nature, which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright.*"

This leads to a good deal of romanticism, both about the then current American West (now known to us through entertainment media and history as “the wild west”) and a trip he also took to the Rhine and the Moselle in Germany. What he saw in both places was a heroic wildness and of the wild he consequently says: “... in Wildness is the preservation of the World.” This Wild he imagines as a vital life source and source of strength:

“*Every tree sends its fibres forth in search of the Wild. The cities import it at any price. Men plough and sail for it. From the forest and wilderness come the tonics and barks which brace mankind. Our ancestors were savages. The story of Romulus and Remus being suckled by a wolf is not a meaningless fable. The founders of every State which has risen to eminence have drawn their nourishment and vigor from a similar wild source. It was because the children of the Empire were not suckled by the wolf that they were conquered and displaced by the children of the Northern forests who were.*”

Thus, Thoreau proclaims:

“*I believe in the forest, and in the meadow, and in the night in which the corn grows... Give me a wildness whose glance no civilization can endure, — as if we lived on the marrow of koodoos (a type of African antelope) devoured raw... I would have every man so much like a wild antelope, so much a part and parcel of Nature, that his very person should thus sweetly advertise our senses of his presence, and remind us of those parts of Nature which he most haunts... How near to good is what is wild! Life consists with wildness. The most alive is the wildest. Not yet subdued to man, its presence refreshes him... Hope and the future for me are not in lawns and cultivated fields, not in towns and cities, but in the impervious and quaking swamps... There is a keen enjoyment in a mere animal existence... When I would recreate myself, I seek the darkest wood, the thickest and most interminable, and, to the*

citizen, most dismal swamp. I enter a swamp as a sacred place, — a sanctum sanctorum. There is the strength, the marrow of Nature... In short, all good things are wild and free… Give me for my friends and neighbors wild men, not tame ones. The wildness of the savage is but a faint symbol of the awful ferity with which good men and lovers meet... Here is this vast, savage, howling mother of ours, Nature, lying all around, with such beauty, and such affection for her children, as the leopard; and yet we are so early weaned from her breast to society, to that culture which is exclusively an interaction of man on man, — a sort of breeding in and in, which produces at most a merely English nobility, a civilization destined to have a speedy limit."

With poetic eulogising such as this, it is no surprise that Thoreau disdains civilisation and government – for he sees no wild vitality in them. Consequently, he makes the political observation in this essay that: "There is something servile in the habit of seeking after a law which we may obey. We may study the laws of matter at and for our convenience, but a successful life knows no law." What it does know, however, is wildness.

Someone else with a particular love for the wild is the English writer and academic Robert Macfarlane who is most famous for his poetic nature writing in books from *Mountains of the Mind* and *The Wild Places* to *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot* and *Underland*. But it is his most recent book (as I write) *Is A River Alive?* which draws my attention to him here. To read Macfarlane's nature writing is to automatically be entered into a poetic and romantic world of words and ideas which beguile and excite the senses. Macfarlane is not writing in logical, intellectual or hortatory style. He is not giving propositions and making discursive arguments in attempts to argue the reader to a conversational position. He is seeking to engage his reader with ideas. He is seeking to confront them with real and visceral landscape they can almost feel, and certainly imagine, through writing. His introduction to

Is A River Alive? is titled “Anima” and this is actually appropriate to Macfarlane’s writing about nature as a class of writing for he is every bit as enthusiastic for nature as Henry David Thoreau was. In the wildness he recognises vitality.

The book itself is a tale of three journeys to rivers in Ecuador, India and Canada set against a background of the “Rights of Nature” movement which has in this century attempted to secure legal protections for natural phenomena (in the same way, for example, that companies can have them). In these chapters you can verily feel the burble of water over landscape and imagine the ecosystems that flowing water gives birth to and maintains. But it is in the introduction where the reader is entered into the grand fiction (in the most positive of senses) of the book: that a river is, indeed, alive and that life is a consequential thing not just when it belongs to a human being but also when it belongs to anything. As Macfarlane himself puts this in the first sentences of his introduction:

“*This book is a journey into an idea that changes the world – the idea that a river is alive. It explores the histories, people, places and futures of that idea and others in its family: that a forest might think, for instance, or a mountain remember. It asks what happens if we take seriously the idea of a river’s aliveness. What does such a recognition mean for perception, law and politics? It is an attempt to imagine water otherwise.*”

I must immediately admit that, from an anarchist perspective, the way Macfarlane wants to package his love of nature, and rivers in particular, in *Is A River Alive?* is not one that is particularly beguiling to me. He uses politically liberal “rights talk” that has singularly failed to give all sorts of things around the world to which it has been applied any “rights” at all worth the name. As it is rights talk it is also prey to all the faults of “rights” in the first place – the most obvious of which is that rights are things someone else gives you

and so are also things someone else can take away from you. In my mind this is not nearly wild or intimate enough a principle to be applying to natural phenomena even though it is clear to see Macfarlane's heart is in the right place. Politically, however, Macfarlane is no Thoreau (much less the Alan Moore who authored *Swamp Thing*). Where Thoreau prefers the minimum of government, Macfarlane's worldview relies on it for it is only through "government" that "rights" can be secured.

But that his major metaphor in his book is life and death is consequential. Should we concede a river is alive (or, at minimum, that it is an ecosystem of living things in interaction where that they are living makes a difference) then it follows that what is alive can be killed and may be being killed by human actions even as we speak. (One might not need to ask Feargal Sharkey about this to realise it is true.) Death, of course, is the ultimate, the terminal, consequence of life and Macfarlane seeks to work through this simple logic to its natural conclusion for no one, at least when it comes to themselves, thinks of death as desirable under normal circumstances. So why should dead rivers be any more palatable to us than dead selves? Of course, they shouldn't be but we are living in a world of strange thought and unthought where nature is imagined as "resources" requiring "conquest" or "control" in order that someone (probably not you) may profit from them. Nature is that thing which has most suffered from the acquisitive, privatising and destructive logic of capitalism, that malign ideology of economic relations birthed in the Euro-American West, because it can be grabbed for free and profited from in the extreme. Rivers are seen as inanimate things useful for washing filth away or for cooling things and that is without considering their status in/as a living ecosystem. They fall, as Macfarlane explains, on the wrong side of a hard border, a dividing line, between "life" and "not life":

"*A hard boundary between 'life' and 'not-life' has been constructed and policed by a world view which decisively locates rivers on the 'not-life' side of the frontier. For those who, like me, have been largely raised on rationalism, to imagine that a river is alive in a way that exceeds the sum of the lives it contains is difficult, counter-intuitive work. It requires unlearning, a process much harder than learning. We might say that the fate of rivers under rationalism has been to become one-dimensional water. Rivers have been systematically stripped of their spirits and reduced to what Isaac Newton called 'inanimate brute matter'.*"

The logic of civilised capitalism, however, is a logic of servitude rather than the wild's "autonomous liveliness" (as Macfarlane puts it). Interacting with post-Second World War Heidegger, who was no lover of technology, he refers to "technocracy's administrative effort to entrap nature 'as a calculable coherence'. Nothing is good in and of itself; everything must be good for something." The philosophy of the user. Under such a mentality rivers become no longer things in their own right that exist as and what they are because they can but they become, instead, things that can be useful for and to human purposes as things which can become subject to some human being's desire. That they are alive is probably not even acknowledged in this equation but even if it is realised it is disregarded. Human purposes, so the capitalist human being thinks, are greater, more important purposes. Such thinking is based on remarkable and wholly arrogant premises:

"*It is unremarkable that flowing fresh water can be owned, for instance – can be privatized and sold, reduced to liquid asset – or to think that access to a river's banks may be tightly controlled or forbidden, rather than being part of a blue commons. It is normalized that a corporation, in the eyes of the law, is an entity with legal standing and a suite of rights, including the right to sue – but that a river who has flowed for thousands of years has no rights at all.*"

Like anything that grows wild and green, rivers are just regarded as “stuff” and stuff, as anyone will tell you, can be used as you like. Especially by those who have either more money or more power than most of us. The beginnings of this logic are quite naturally in our language, our grammatical use of words:

“*Words make worlds. In English, we ‘it’ rivers, trees, mountains, oceans, birds and animals: a mode of address that reduces them to the status of stuff, and distinguishes them from human persons. In English, pronouns for natural features are ‘which’ or ‘that’, not ‘who’: the river that flows; the forest that grows. I prefer to speak of rivers who flow and forests who grow. In English, we speak of a river in the singular. But ‘river’ is one of the great group nouns, containing multitudes. In English, there is no verb ‘to river’. But what could be more of a verb than a river?*”

I share something in common with Robert Macfarlane. We both come from England. As a result, we both know the common knowledge that under perhaps the only wholly privatised water system in the world “every river in England is dying”. This is not theory or discourse for us because all around us flows water poisoned, dead and dying – for commercial profit. And as Macfarlane is sure to point out, this is because English waterways, like many others in the industrialised world, have been subject to successive and consistent “violence”. “They are dying through inattention and they are being killed by design.” This creeping death eventually finds its way inland, as it must as part of ecosystems. As Macfarlane reports of the Elwha river in Washington State after that river was undammed after a century, giving the watercourse new life:

“*As the river brought the salmon back, so with them came the web of life they feed. Salmon are primarily ocean creatures; they carry marine nutrients far inland in their bodies when*

they come to spawn. In the upper Elwha watershed, scavengers dragged the carcasses of dead and dying salmon into the forest, stripped flesh and guts and discarded the skeletons to rot on the moss and leaves. Fungi reached up their white ghost-fingers, drew the bones down and decomposed them – then shared the goodness with the roots of the trees. By means of the river, the ocean fed the forest."

As the logic of ecosystems demands, life is vast, connected and microscopic. It is in the water. It is in the soil. It is in the air. Everywhere. To kill something as alive as a river does not only have consequences for things flowing within its banks. The consequences spread far and wide. The death and poison spread like cancers with ultimate consequences. It leads to much poetic meandering in Is A River Alive? This meandering is necessary for we must leave the world of civilised forced order, possession and logic behind and enter into a life of autonomy, biology and chaos if we want to understand and appreciate the river as itself. As Macfarlane then narrativses one of his trips:

"*Perhaps the body knows what the mind cannot. Days on the water have produced in me the intensifying feeling of somehow growing-together with the river: not thinking with it, but being thought by it. This physical sensation of merging, almost of capture, has occurred far more powerfully over the past fortnight, I realize, than I've known before, even during longer journeys in the mountains. Rivers are running through me, I think; I've been flowed through and onwards.*

When I mention this to Wayne, he nods in recognition. 'Oh yes,' he says, 'I've also felt something like this. I think it's important to recognize that this kind of merging doesn't happen as an epiphany; it's a chronic rather than an acute process. Paddling into those headwinds. The appearance of a pine marten at the first river camp. Being slapped and

dunked and twisted by the rapids. I've not felt . . . entirely myself, as if I've been somehow – and not voluntarily, and not entirely pleasantly – hybridized with the larger situation in which we have been participating during this journey, which includes, perhaps above all, this giant body of moving water with whom we have all been flowing.' He pauses. 'But as for how the hell you might construct a politics or law out of this kind of apprehension, though? That I just don't know. We scarcely have words full stop to cover even the basic phenomenology of what you're calling "growing-together" with the river, let alone political structures that might accommodate it. That said, it seems to me that the encounter with these hugely other beings is where the making of a politics with the more-than-human world has to start. Without any sense of that presence, we can barely articulate our end of the politics – let alone that of the river.'...

'I've been thinking through some of the hard matters raised by the declaration you read from last night,' Wayne says after a while, 'indeed by the whole Rights of Nature movement, and those phrases like "living entity" and "fundamental rights". Behind all of this lurks the surely unanswerable question: how do we know what the river wants?' 'What the river wants is . . . to reach the sea,' I say. It feels like an inadequate response. 'Gravity is not intention, but that doesn't mean there isn't intentionality present. But – a river is not a decision-making entity, Hydro-Québec will say.'

'I can think of few things more decisive than a river.' 'Yet humans still make decisions on behalf of, and with consequence for, this immense being, or force, or presence – or whatever you want to call the river. In fact they have to, whether they want to dam it or assert what they've decided is its "fundamental right" to flow freely from source to sea.' 'A god. For now, I want to call the river a god. And why should a god make choices we would recognize as choices?'

'Over the course of this journey, I've sometimes wondered,' says Wayne, 'are we a client species for the river? Is Hydro-Québec, in fact, a client entity for the river, performing functions the river wants to have performed on its behalf? The thought-experiment is worth undertaking, if only to jolt the mind out of its usual grooves of proprietary thinking about "more-than-human" presences. But I remain sceptical of the notion of giving voice to or for a river. It strikes me as both insufficient and fraught with the risk of ventriloquizing. Better by far to help the river do as it will, in my opinion, either directly on its behalf (if a credible line of communication can be opened with it at some future point), or else by protecting a context in which it is able to do its own thing, however inexplicably. Which for this river might mean flooding as well as flowing; backing up as well as running on.'

'It's the crux that needs solving, for sure,' I say. 'Not "Who speaks for the river?" but "What does the river say?" These are two distinct questions. And while it's relatively trivial to answer the first of them, it's a philosophically immense task to answer the second.' 'Yup. I sometimes wonder if the Rights of Nature is just serving as a proxy in an asymmetrical power situation that already exists, irrespective of the river's . . . actuality. For it not to be merely a disguised form of political manoeuvring between and among us humans, we'll need to find ways of listening to, and with, these other beings – river gods included. And that obviously needs to be happening not just among Indigenous communities, or among artists and writers and fringe-weirdos like us – but also state actors, corporate actors, industrial actors, the whole cast. The power-holders.'"

What does the river want? It seems a profound question as well as an anthropomorphic one. But that doesn't make it invalid. Human beings must make sense as human beings even as rivers must make sense as rivers. So what does the river want? "To be a river" is the only answer I can make sense of. To live as a river. To take part in the concatenation of

relations and conditions that make up this planet as a river. To become as a river. This is not about rights and laws and human decisions which, benevolent or malign, are all similarly just more presumptive human decision. We need empathy for other ways of being than our own. That is what a river teaches us. It teaches us to let things be, for our own good as well as theirs. And that can be the basis of a politics – but one strange and foreign to the coercivity that currently reigns supreme in the Anthropocene.

Someone who has tried to build a politics out of wildness is that character variously known as Apio Ludd, Wolfi Landstreicher or Feral Faun. This American egoist anarchist was probably formative in my own focus on wildness and the wild as an inspiration to anarchy. (I say "probably" because I cannot trace definitive lines of influence in my intellectual development. I just know I have read quite a lot of him in the past and, perhaps by osmosis, I now find myself agreeing with a lot of what he says and using it as motivation for what I say myself.) His collection of essays issued under the Feral Faun moniker as *Feral Revolution and Other Essays* features an introduction by that stalwart of Italian insurrectionary anarchism, Alfredo Bonanno, which is just as interesting as the contents of the book. But what is this "feral revolution" about which Feral Faun writes? Interestingly, it seems to be about awakening from a childhood full of freedom, emotional intensity and authenticity to an adulthood characterised by domestication and civilisation. "Civilization will not tolerate what is wild in its midst" and "domestication" is virtually impossible to resist or escape when one is but a child. (Why do you think state schooling exists?) As a result, Feral Faun writes:

"*My existence since I first began to notice that this vitality was being drained away has been a warfare between the needs of civilized survival and the need to break loose and experience the full intensity of life unbound. I want to experience this vital energy again. I*

want to know the free-spirited wildness of my unrepressed desires realizing themselves in festive play. I want to smash down every wall that stands between me and the intense, passionate life of untamed freedom that I want. The sum of these walls is everything we call civilization, everything that comes between us and the direct, participatory experience of the wild world."

This highlights what Robert Macfarlane was pointing out in talking about rivers: the wild is different. It is a different mentality. It has other conditions. It follows a different impetus. It recontextualises everything. It is to be contrasted with "a web of domination" and "domesticating authority". Feral describes that in this way:

"*Domesticating authority takes many forms, some of which are difficult to recognize. Government, capital and religion are some of the more obvious faces of authority. But technology, work, language with its conceptual limits, the ingrained habits of etiquette and propriety — these too are domesticating authorities which transform us from wild, playful, unruly animals into tamed, bored, unhappy producers and consumers. These things work in us insidiously, limiting our imaginations, usurping our desires, suppressing our lived experience. And it is the world created by these authorities, the civilized world, in which we live.*"

Now Feral Faun sensibly realises that domesticating and dominating authority like this has no one centre that can be smashed and – hey presto! – it is gone. This is not, and cannot, be about killing or destroying the one material thing which is keeping things this way. It is, and must be, about more than that lest we recreate the past once more where the revolutionaries fight the power, destroy it – and then recreate it in their own image in and through themselves. As Feral Faun indicates, this is about more than institutions, ideas

and material forces. It is in how we speak, how we relate, how we imagine. The wild is not simply (or even!) a place: it is a state of mind. We fight against a web of connections that bind us and we must always be entangled in such a web (for that is simply existing) but it doesn't always have to be a web that exhibits the same characteristics. So, as in other anarchist theorising, it has to be a revolution carried out after the means of what one seeks to create. And if you want to live feral then your revolution must be feral too. A canal is not a river: be a river and not a canal.

So how should this be actualised?

"*There can be no programs or organizations for feral revolution, because wildness cannot spring from a program or organization. Wildness springs from the freeing of our instincts and desires, from the spontaneous expression of our passions. Each of us has experienced the processes of domestication, and this experience can give us the knowledge we need to undermine civilization and transform our lives. Our distrust of our own experience is probably what keeps us from rebelling as freely and actively as we'd like. We're afraid of fucking up, we're afraid of our own ignorance. But this distrust and fear have been instilled in us by authority. It keeps us from really growing and learning. It makes us easy targets for any authority that is ready to fill us. To set up 'revolutionary' programs is to play on this fear and distrust, to reinforce the need to be told what to do. No attempt to go feral can be successful when based on such programs. We need to learn to trust and act upon our own feelings and experiences, if we are ever to be free. So I offer no programs.*"

As a consequence, and as I have been proceeding over several years in and through my own writing, "part of the revolutionary process is a process of personal transformation". It

is about “breaking down conditioning” and “getting as free of our domestication as we can”. For:

“*In a very general way, we know what we want. We want to live as wild, free beings in a world of wild, free beings. The humiliation of having to follow rules, of having to sell our lives away to buy survival, of seeing our usurped desires transformed into abstractions and images in order to sell us commodities fills us with rage. How long will we put up with this misery? We want to make this world into a place where our desires can be immediately realized, not just sporadically, but normally. We want to re-eroticize our lives. We want to live not in a dead world of resources, but in a living world of free wild lovers. We need to start exploring the extent to which we are capable of living these dreams in the present without isolating ourselves. This will give us a clearer understanding of the domination of civilization over our lives, an understanding which will allow us to fight domestication more intensely and so expand the extent to which we can live wildly. Attempting to live as wildly as possible now will also help break down our social conditioning. This will spark a wild prankishness in us which will take aim at all that would tame it, undermining civilization and creating new ways of living and sharing with each other. These explorations will expose the limits of civilization’s domination and will show its inherent opposition to freedom. We will discover possibilities we have never before imagined...* “

In “Nature as spectacle. The image of wilderness vs. wildness” Feral Faun makes the argument that even “nature” itself can be used as an idea to domesticate. This is because “nature” – in the sense we conceptualise and think about it – doesn’t actually exist:

“*Nature has not always existed. It is not found in the depths of the forest, in the heart of the cougar or in the songs of the pygmies; it is found in the philosophies and image*

constructions of civilized human beings. Seemingly contradictory strands are woven together creating nature as an ideological construct that serves to domesticate us, to suppress and channel our expressions of wildness."

Nature, in this respect, is "civilisation's nature" and its conceptions of things function as part of the webs of understanding it manufactures (which, obviously, are for its own purposes). Feral Faun argues that "nature" or "the wild" are actually some of its most important concepts for they are a way of limiting and encapsulating the things they describe. If that becomes "wilderness" then it can be imagined as a wild outside, a contrast to the imagined civilised order. It is part of a language of control and manipulation in which the wild becomes "resources for civilization". It is giving the outside a name to make it useful to the insiders. Feral Faun regards this as a partisan language game, however, for what is wild and free is being tamed in and through language:

"*The concept of nature creates systems of social value and morality. Because of the apparently contradictory strands that have gone into the development of 'nature,' these systems also may appear contradictory; but they all achieve the same end: our domestication. Those who tell us to 'act civilized' and those who tell us to 'act natural' are really telling us the same thing: 'Live in accordance with external values, not in accordance with your desires.'*"

For Feral Faun, then, the wild is, perhaps counterintuitively, something internal about us and not simply a place outside. The enemy is artificial constructions that are wielded to control or condition or imprison us in an understanding. (In the wild one has the impression, in addition, that ALL such constructions are "artificial".) A very common one for the past several hundred years has been the one Hobbes conjured up in *Leviathan*

where life is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”. (This is his “state of nature”.) Thus, according to Feral Faun:

“*From its beginnings, nature has been an image created by authority to reinforce its power. It is no surprise that in modern society, where image dominates reality and often seems to create it, ‘nature’ comes into its own as a means of keeping us domesticated. ‘Nature’ shows on TV, Sierra Club calendars, ‘wilderness’ outfitters, ‘natural’ foods and fibers, the ‘environmental’ president and ‘radical’ ecology all conspire to create ‘nature’ and, our ‘proper’ relationship to it. The image evoked retains aspects of the ‘evil wilderness’ of early civilization in a subliminal form. ‘Nature’ shows always include scenes of predation and the directors of these shows have been said to use electric prods in attempts to goad animals into fights. The warnings given to would-be ‘wilderness’ explorers about dangerous animals and plants and the amount of products created by ‘wilderness’ outfitters for dealing with these things is quite excessive from my own experiences wandering in wild places. We are given the image of life outside of civilization as a struggle for survival.*”

Feral Faun’s argument is that this image is created because it suits civilisation to create it. (It certainly suited Thomas Hobbes to create his.) If people didn’t need civilisation, if they didn’t need to be “civilised”, then they might just abandon it to live perfectly satisfactory “wild” lives instead. So we get the “Wilderness Area” which, according to Feral Faun, “is the separation of ‘wildness’ and ‘humanity’” as if one had nothing to do with the other. (Ironically, for many of the civilised this is true since they have lost any native ability to live outside cities and civilisation has never been interested in educating them about it – except as a consumer lifestyle.) Even “radical ecologists” can be prey to control by language:

"*those 'radical ecologists' who claim to want to reintegrate people into 'nature' are fooling themselves. Their vision of (as one of them put it) a 'wild, symbiotic whole' is just the monolithic concept created by civilization worded in a quasi-mystical way. 'Wildness' continues to be a monolithic entity for these ecological mystics, a being greater than us, a god to whom we must submit. But submission is domestication.*"

To that we may contrast the following:

"*When wildness is seen as having nothing to do with any monolithic concept, including 'nature' or 'wilderness,' when it is seen as the potential free spiritedness in individuals that could manifest at any moment, only then does it become a threat to civilization. Any of us could spend years in 'the wilderness,' but if we continued to see what surrounded us through the lens of civilization, if we continued to see the myriads of beings monolithically as 'nature,' as 'wilderness,' as the 'wild, symbiotic whole,' we'd still be civilized; we would not be wild. But if, in the midst of the city, we at any moment actively refuse our domestication, refuse to be dominated by the social roles that are forced upon us and instead live in terms of our passions, desires and whims, if we become the unique and unpredictable beings that lie hidden beneath the roles, we are, for that moment, wild. Playing fiercely among the ruins of a decaying civilization (but don't be fooled, even in decay it is a dangerous enemy and capable of staggering on for a long time), we can do our damnedest to bring it tumbling down. And free-spirited rebels will reject the survivalism of ecology as just another attempt by civilization to suppress free life, and will strive to live the chaotic, ever-changing dance of freely relating, unique individuals in opposition both to civilization and to civilization's attempt to contain wild, free-spirited living: 'Nature.'*"

Feral Faun includes numerous other essays in his collection but it is Alfredo Bonanno's interpretation of their meaning and import that I want to turn to next. This seems, first and foremost, to be an imaginal achievement:

"*Anyone can spend years 'in the wilderness', Feral maintains, referring to the possibility of entering the reality of which the 'wilderness' marks the extreme limit. It is the moment of truth when we discover whether we are really capable of breaking our bonds with society, the umbilical cord that protects and domesticates us. That is why this book is revolutionary: because it does not interpret reality but tries to take us into reality just as the author himself has ventured, although for no measurable length of time.*

It is not a question of clinging tightly to the vine that Feral has thrown down to us from his tree and diving into the fray. It is not a question of a wild attitude or something 'sayable' that can be set out in a formula, but of a totally different idea of reality. Tourists who travel around the world to 'wildly inaccessible' places merely take time off from their lives of accumulative delirium and let themselves go wild within certain well-defined limits. They are always well equipped, take a guide along with them, etc. In the face of this obscene spectacle it might seem that all one has to do to avoid 'doing the tourist' is to omit the safety measures and guide and leave one's baggage at home. Feral, I think, is saying that this is pointless because there is no sense in going to wild places if one carries on seeing them in the way we have been conditioned to. Nature itself can even contribute to domesticating us: 'Nature' domesticates—Feral writes—because it transforms wildness into a monolithic entity, a huge realm separate from civilisation. The same goes for any 'militant' ecologist conception we might decide to choose. Ecologists—even 'radical' ones—play right into this. Rather than go wild and destroy civilisation with the energy of their unchained desires, they try to 'save the wilderness'."

Thus, wildness is not the civilised avatar which does service for civilisation and its discourse, it is that which is simply itself and which will overtake and destroy civilisation (inevitably and however long it takes) as part of being itself. The wild does not even recognise civilisation's existence and so for the wild it is just something else to be wilded, to be wild in. It is for this reason, as Bonanno confirms with Feral Faun, that "The real wild, not the caricature circulated by travel agencies in illustrated brochures, cannot be tolerated by civilised society." So there is a positive antagonism from civilisation towards the wild, one that is not reciprocated for the wild does not notice civilisation's existence. In this world it is a matter for us of "going beyond" civilisation for that is where the wild is – beyond our own domestication. This is not to support a strict binary for culture, even human culture, is and must be part of nature. But it is to be wild rather than civilised and to recognise a rhetorical distinction in and between those ways of being. Thus, Bonanno comments:

"*If this unity of the world where nature is not distinct from humanity, or the wilderness from the Japanese city with its advanced urban technology, has any significance at all, it is in this 'going beyond'. That is to say it is to be found at the very moment in which one's own personal tension and wild vital energy comes alive and sets to transforming the conditions of domestication. If we were to imagine this going beyond as one single, circumscribed event to take us to a condition forever free from domestication—as was the case with the Marxist thesis—the point of arrival would be no more than a higher level of domestication, one where we would not even be aware of being domesticated.*

[So] Adventure, in order to be such, is always adventure in act. If it were simply adventure tout court it would end up being institutionalised and the wild, vital instinct would become limitless and with no measure of contrast, so we would be unable to dream or attack."

It is in this context that Bonanno highlights the importance of "the wild" to and for an understanding of anarchy and in and through it I see the equation of the two:

"*'The attempt to make a moral principle of anarchy distorts its real significance. Anarchy describes a particular type of situation, one in which either authority does not exist or its power to control is denied. Such a situation guarantees nothing—not even the continued existence of that situation, but it does open up the possibility for each of us to start creating our lives for ourselves in terms of our own desires and passions rather than in terms of social roles and the demands of social order. Anarchy is not the goal of revolution; it is the situation that makes the only type of revolution that interests me possible—an uprising of individuals to create their lives for themselves and destroy what stands in their way. It is a situation free of any moral implications, presenting each of us with the amoral challenge to live our lives without constraints. Since the anarchic situation is amoral, the idea of an anarchist morality is highly suspect. Morality is a system of principles defining what constitutes right and wrong behaviour'...*

anarchy is not and never could be the aim of the revolution, but is the situation (I would say the personal situation) that makes the revolution possible. And I agree, but this can only define itself as 'amoral' if it continues in the perspective of 'going beyond', never becoming something established. Otherwise this final 'whole' condition would require moral rules in order to organise itself and persist in time."

Anarchy, as the wild, is "the situation". It is things as they are with their desires, conditions and proclivities. It is the world beyond "domesticating narratives" – which is to say ANY narratives. It is a moment of nihilism but a nihilism that is liberating. (An educated friend of mine who I describe this to describes it back to me as "a libertarian theory of nihilism"

and I like that.) Later on, Bonanno adds that “freedom is growth to infinity” and that seems pertinent here too for, in freedom, the “going beyond” can never stop, never settle, never become established or institutionalised. For that is just more civilisation and domestication of the wild. Thus:

“*everything continues in the never-ending process of going beyond, in the movement of freedom that does not see what is freed as something other than oneself and one’s desire to unleash this ‘vital energy’ that continues to flow from an inexhaustible source. Feral’s acrobatic juxtaposition of ideas culminates in this endless transition, the tension that never solidifies, the barricades that never cease fighting, the violence that never quells... a community of individual insurgents, a totality of individuals each developing his or her own personal insurrection...*”

But here Bonanno makes a very important point. Because it is wild, feral, and not civilised or domesticated, not according to some collective or organising narrative, such activity must be personal:

“*If I decide to break the chains of domestication, I can only do so because I feel the chains and suffer the effects of domestication on my own skin.*”

In the wild there is always that independence, that self-organisation, that is characteristic of life itself and which enables all the rest. For such people life is a constant experiment in which the wager is their own life. But what else should you risk your life for but your own wishes and desires? And here is the rub, the consequence of wildness:

"*Admission to such a condition of freedom cannot be gained through normal procedures of reason. It cannot be deduced from what we know through our daily experience (chains and domestication) but is born elsewhere in the genetic-historical interrelation that produces our most radical impulses, our wildest desires and dreams of eternal love that nothing can ever dim, and the taste for wild adventure. In a word, everything that Feral talks about and much more besides. If I were to limit myself to thinking about this coldly I would never be able to convince myself that it existed or that it was something worth involving myself in and risking the tranquillity of the chains which the culture of domestication renders more or less bearable. If I go beyond this level, (and how many millions of people never do!) it is because at some point I become unreasonable, throw all care to the winds, and act.*"

The wild is where things act – for themselves – but not only to their own consequence. And Bonanno makes this point immediately too:

"*But in practice it is impossible to put all one's projects, taste, desire and love aside. In fact, in throwing down his vine, this wild man who lives in a tree and wanders free among the American redwoods is throwing me an object of love. He is linking me to him with love in the hope of taking me with him to that tree of freedom, another wild man like himself. Because life in freedom would be a poor thing indeed if it were simply a territory of complete desolation with no relationships, therefore relations. Like everything that passes between human beings, the latter depend on taste, desire, love, pleasure, but also hatred, fear, anxiety, and much more besides.*"

In fact, I would make the case that the wild, anarchy, freedom, is ALL ABOUT relationships. None of these things involve a solipsistic existence. The wild is a wild community of vast diversity and nothing can avoid bumping into it repeatedly.

In the 1990s various forms of environmental, ecological and "biocentrist" interest and activism bloomed. One aspect of this was demonstrated in the so-called Deep or Radical Ecology movements (against which folks like the aforementioned Murray Bookchin railed) and Earth First! alongside more mainstream environmentalists. Another, and different, example would be eco-feminism which identified the Earth's plight with that of women. At the same time there were ecologically interested anarchists who also came to the fore (John Zerzan is a good example there although people, at least in the past, often associated him with something labelled "primitivism" instead) and two of these, one being Chris Kortright, formed the short lived *Feral: A Journal Towards Wildness*. This journal – seemingly comprising of only two issues before its organisers moved on to other things – is notable because what it seeks to focus on is exactly WILDNESS rather than either bourgeois conservational concerns or some "pure" form of anarchistic leftism detached from naturalistic reality. So in "Welcome to Feral: a journal towards wildness", the journal's opening article, co-founder and co-editor Chris Kortright says:

"*Fer-al adj: wild, or existing in a state of nature, as freely occurring animals or plants; having reverted to the wild state from domestication. There you are, that's the definition. But what does that have to do with environmentalism, anarchy, or activism? When James and I decided to put this magazine together we felt there were fundamental things missing from the larger picture of environmental as well as anarchist activism. In general, the environmental movement seeks to save (as an example) wilderness in pockets such as parks or wilderness areas. Asking for parcels large enough to 'survive' but small enough to be allocated by government agencies. In the more radical approach there may be a strategy of larger areas, no roads or zero cut. However, the average conservationist is willing to 'ask' and wait and ask again. This legitimizes the concept of governments and private property. Within the context of begging for 'pockets of wilderness' from the power structure the idea*

that wilderness should exist for itself gets lost in the government's authority to dictate what life deserves to exist. It also never challenges the institution of government and power by asking the question 'do the natural world and humans prosper more effectively in a state of freedom or coercion?' It also comes short in analyzing and attacking industrialism and technologies' assault on everyday life. Not just 'bad' or 'hard' technology, but technology in general. Does technology alienate humans from each other and the natural world as well as lay the ground work and ability to dominate and destroy the natural world? I think you'll find the answer to both is yes. And maybe most important, it reinforces the same separation between humans and the natural world that we accuse the 'anthropocentric' thinkers as celebrating. It denies a wildness in us as human beings. Can we as activists incorporate a re-wildness in ourselves as we defend the wildernesses, can humans go feral? Can these ideas come together in dialogue and practice, freedom of humans and freedom of the wild, wilderness and human wildness?

In turning to the anarchist movement, too much of it is based ideologically and strategically on industrialist thinking. Celebrating "work" and "rationalism" it is hard for many anarchists to see the necessity of defending and fighting for the freedom of all life; for all life to exist for itself... [yet] It's time not only to defend the wild but become wild. We need to take on an offensive role in tearing down this nightmare that cripples us and dulls our instincts and desires."

We can see there that Kortright's critique is double-pronged: he criticises environmentalism and he also criticises anarchism (and, actually, the Left as a political position more broadly). He makes it clear that actual wildness is neither of these things and beyond both of them. IT IS ABOUT BECOMING THE WILD IN ONE'S OWN SELF. This is further made clear in the piece "Not Left But Wild!" co-written with Craig Evarts which has

sections both on “the Left” (criticising especially the leftism of the likes of Murray Bookchin who, as we have seen, wanted to marry nature to the city and rationalise everything in some post-Marxist organisational scheme that deplored “wildness”) and “wildness” itself. I find that this piece hits several nails on the head, especially that one in which anarchy is a part of leftism (it isn’t) and so is obsessed with workers and industrialism and rights and basically the state as it is. All such leftism really wants is a fair deal for the actual producers. It offers no critique of wealth, property or the state as such nor any program for their eradication or avoidance. In fact, it is very happy with all of them so long as, on the face of it, they (and their power) are shared around more equitably. It knows nothing of wildness and actually despises it if it so much as catches a glimpse of it. (Bookchin is the paradigm example here.) It cannot understand freedom from the state (which is simultaneously freedom to be wild) because it is focused on creating its own version of the state. It wants to create a technological future in which all human problems are solved by a constant myth of progress (which is what traditional leftism ultimately amounts to as Nietzsche theorised it as secularised Christianity). Thus, it is a controlling mentality which ends up despising autonomy or personal agency or free association as much as any fascist does. (Again, you only have to read Bookchin to see all this laid bare.) So Kortright says:

“*The question needs to go out to the Leftist telling us that only through worker-controlled factories can we find self-liberation. Do you believe your utopia will eliminate the pollution and toxins created by industry, the child and spouse abuse created by the self-loathing of constant drudgery as well as the self abuse through drugs and alcohol to either cope with work or be more effective at it (the use of speed to work harder)? To all these the answer is no! Industrialism can’t function without toxins. Contrary to what most Leftists believe we can’t have eco-friendly technology, the computer that you can’t live without cannot be*

made without toxins. So as you are liberating yourself you are also poisoning the air you breathe and the water you drink as well as killing many other species."

This echoes thoughts I have uttered before whenever people enter into argument with me about capitalism and its supposed benefits. I always reply: "But at what cost?" and no one ever has any answer because the capitalist just throws their rubbish behind them and forgets about it, not realising that all that rubbish does not just go away but is certain to come back and haunt them. In a capitalist era no one ever counts the cost because all they are interested in is creating and counting the private profit. A water guzzling, power consuming, AI data centre? No problem! Get it built immediately! But such a data centre was never genuinely needed and only exists to make some CEO outrageously rich and powerfully influential. Another portion of the world is exploited and depleted to make very few individuals more wealthy than they already are and exists as an example to others to do the same for "becoming privately rich" is seen as the obvious and desired goal for everyone. Simultaneously everything becomes a commodity and is thought of in terms of profit. Social relations have been turned into commercial opportunities and all the while the damage done is pushed to one side, buried, hidden or burnt. Something else is covered over too: that all this commercial activity still requires people to do it. No wonder tech bros want AI to do peoples' jobs and are working on inventing robots that can replace people. It is the ultimate consequence of the techno-fascist picture of social relations. For, put simply, such a view is anti-life and anti-wildness.

Wildness cannot be co-opted. It cannot be turned into a commodity. It does not exist for profit. It is useless to the capitalist as also to the state (which includes Murray Bookchin's leftist city-states). Of course, as Kortright says here, people try to turn it into a commodity. They market consumer nature experiences even as they try to market

resistance by means of “Resist!” t-shirts (sometimes with, of all things, a Star Wars Rebel Alliance logo on them. How rebellious is it of you to be wearing a logo owned by Disney?) All kinds of people will try to co-opt resistance and market it back to the people in molded form. But genuine wildness is not that. It is worth quoting Kortright in full on this:

“*Wildness is the playful insurrection of our deepest and most instinctual desires. These desires can only be defined and fulfilled by us as individuals or small clusters of individuals. It is raw unmediated emotion. It is living every moment on the brink of the unknown, like the butterflies you get in your stomach when you are interacting with a person you are attracted to (and you still don’t know if they are attracted to you); playing the mutual attraction dance not knowing who will admit the attraction first, raw and spontaneous sex with a new partner. The fear and excitement a snowboarder or skier feels when they hit a jump or mountain side that they are not prepared for. Or the stimulation someone feels jumping out a plane before they pull their parachute. Wildness is not only about sex and dangerous extreme sports but they are the few personal interactions with one another and life that can still possibly be spontaneous, raw and unmediated (but too often turned into a commodity). It is the free, untamed self the one that you find in the wilderness or in the midst of passion, the unpredictable, uncontrollable emotions that everyday life has killed.*

We have no program, no plan, no organization, not even a name or slogan to rally under. None of us will lead you to were you need to go. This time it must come from you, from each of us, as individuals we must look around and feel what’s going on; see the alienation, the taming, controlling. Now act! This time it is up to you there are no rules, no dialectic to adhere to. No manifestos will be written, no how-to books or battle plans. This revolution will not only not be televised — it will not be mediated. It can only come about by living free, participating in a revolt of every aspect of everyday life.

In the process of living life in and for the moment, actualizing your desires and creating the wild side in you, confrontations with authority will accrue. This revolt of/for life will bring down all we know now. It has no option because being free is not compatible with any incarnation of authority or control; be it work, commodity economics, laws, or wilderness 'management'. So break out of the cage of society and stop following failed ideals. No one can liberate you but yourself. By buying in to leftist ideology you will be shackling your own leg to the factory floor, cracking the whip upon yourself and your loved ones. So find your loved ones, the ones you trust and make life real. Untame your desires, run wild and remember creation only comes from destruction. For all that is wild, all that is caged and, of course, for yourself bring down the walls."

In "On Going Feral" James Barnes issues an urgent reminder of something I have emphasised before: "the terms and conditions of freedom [are] responsibility for [your] own lives." In the wild everything is responsible for itself – often singularly and collectively at the same time (I make no arbitrary or artificial distinction here). The thing is, humans domesticated themselves (and far too much else besides) and so it is entirely within their own hands to undomesticate them again. Indeed, as Barnes intimates, it is a matter of their responsibility. But, as the same James Barnes adds in another short piece called "Wildness":

"*If the dichotomy wild/domestic is valid, it is not by reference to human versus non-human, the domesticated, the tame comes from but rather the impulse to subsume under the authority of our conscious selves the autonomy of the other, whether that is a landscape, a creature or a part of our own striving for freedom.*

Wildness is the ineffable quality of the left-alone, the autonomous and self-creating. It is not ordered, managed or restored. It's existence is independent: it can be used, altered and even destroyed (in places, in part) but it cannot be manufactured. It is not pure, nor is it a clear thing: it is the result of a movement of forces some of which may have intent and purpose, but cannot direct the whole. It includes all of us."

Wildness, that is, is non-intentional as an overall phenomenon. It cannot be mimicked or deliberately created for it is only actualised in (and as) a contingent libertarian nihilism of independent (yet interdependent) things. Its creation is always accidental – "doing nothing, nothing is left undone" – in the words of the Daoists. In this mentality, exampled in the anonymous text "Born Caged":

"*colonizers [which is what urban humans are] entrap themselves in their systems of oppression. The cities and later the suburbs become cages teeming with humanity but devoid of relationships with other beings. We become isolated from the larger biological community, separated from the natural world which gives context to all that humans do. Prepackaged entertainment designed for individual consumption replaces social events that build community (e.g., kitchen dances, contra dances, barn raisings, festivals, community songs). Technology increasingly mediates interactions amongst people and interactions between humans and the natural world. We are trapped in ever more constricting spheres of aloneness, narcissism and pacification.*"

As I have said many times before, modern civilisation is the ever-tightening noose around the neck, a prison of relationships in which walls are not needed because where could you run to when a satellite in space can locate you or the phone in your pocket or bag is telling on you, the result of a "European mindset, hell-bent on exerting control and order over

the landscape"? The penal (and inherently anti-wild) connotations of civilised existence (in their extreme case which is and will always be the USA) are outlined by this anonymous writer as follows:

"*There are one-and-a-half million Americans behind bars and razor wire. [In 2025 this is now nearer 2 million.] This is the first clue that our society is oriented around incarceration. But each one of us leads a life of imprisonment where schooling is essentially mandatory, followed by compulsory labor in adulthood. This expansive penal colony maintains order in three ways.*

First, various levels of confinement have been established. People who don't follow the rules are stripped of their limited freedoms and moved to a more restrictive institution. Supermax facilities and 'the hole' are no more than small concrete boxes, no more than eight corners. A medium security installation allows contact with other prisoners and occasionally with the sun and the wind. A minimum-security installation might even allow contact with plants and soil through landscaping duty or a roadside clean-up crew. Cities allow free association amongst humans and pigeons. Suburbs have fuzzier boundaries where wildness creeps in despite all the pruning, the herbicides and the roadkill.

The second method of maintaining order is by providing limitless distractions. TV [probably now replaced by the Internet] is the great pacifier within the prison walls. At decreasing levels of confinement, more associations are permitted but more distractions also exist. The plethora of hobbies, toys, videos, techno-gadgets and consumer junk grows logarithmically with each holiday season.

The third method of maintaining order is by denying prisoners the skills, the means and the attitudes necessary to successfully live outside, so that they will end up back inside. The systems of confinement are thereby perpetuated but without appearing to be overly repressive. Prisoners seem to end up back in prison because of their own desires or shortcomings. This is true for inmates released from prison and equally for each one of us wanting to be released from the grip of techno-industrial society. (Observe the difficulty that even seasoned Earth First!ers experience camping away from vehicles, sleeping outside of tents, venturing away from the campfire, foraging food, exploring the night. How many of us have actually spent an entire season or two in the Big Outside?)"

Confinement, distraction, disablement: these are the methods by which civilisation keeps out the wild and makes a return to it as impossible as it possibly can be. Even should we approach the wild and find it attractive, we find we have little to no ability to live with, in and as it whilst, at the same time, finding that the long arms of civilisation reach out to pull us back in again. No wonder civilisation is actively destroying the wild places outside of cities at an ever increasing rate. It simply wants nowhere left that people could go to be wild in the first place: a world prison. And so, to get back to Chris Kortright again in his piece “Lust For A Wild Life”:

“*Industrialism has created a world where the whole human environment and every object in it are to serve the cause of ‘production’ and to remind people that their only happiness lies in the industrial world. This artificial world built by humans who want to remove the last wild influence in the world, promises to be so all-encompassing that it will be impossible for humans to see, imagine, or even hope for anything beyond it.*"

Imagine a world in which “the wild” was impossible even to imagine. Imagine a world in which nothing can ever be different than as it is, than as it has been made. Imagine a world in which you are alienated from anything uncontrolled or possessed of its own sense of self or direction or desire. This is the world the civilisers want. But Kortright is clear that it is this world or the wild one for one must destroy the other in both directions: “A free and wild world can only be created in the ruins of this civilization.” His prescription should be familiar to my previous readers:

“*This new free and wild society must also be born among the ruins of another kind, a more important kind. These are the ruins of the death culture, the social relationships we create with everything in the world. The relationship with the non-human world needs to move from a resource, superiority relationship to one of playmates in a world of adventure. With our fellow human beings we must dismantle the commodity relationships that have been created by work culture, instead of thinking about what we get from one another lets experience and feel one another. With our lovers the relationships are usually production-based, we enter into one contract or another depending of the product outcome we expect from our commitment. As radicals we are bringing one of the most disgusting attributes of industrial capitalism into the most beautiful places in our lives. There should not be contracts with our lovers. Agreement, understandings, honest dialogue — these are necessary, but if you create your love life to a economical/legal model it will be as lifeless and unfulfilling as economic life. Whether your relationship is for an evening or your life, non-monogamous or monogamous, it must be spontaneous, passionate and void of laws. Trying to create new relationships with the world sounds better then waiting for the revolution, doesn’t it?*”

This mentality is a kind of madness – and I fully lean into that fact. The wild is not rationalism and is almost certainly not rational either. (Reason, at best, is a tool or faculty and not a principle.) It is why, in my previous book with its "Green Queer Erotic Love Magic", its symbol and totem was Dionysos, Dionysos the mad god of wild revelry in woodland groves. This is the reality I seek to conjure and to recapture (for I was torn bodily from it and cast into sterile and controlling civilisation as much as anybody else). Yet civilisation has already happened and no one, no matter how fervent in their desire, can simply go back and forget it ever existed. Instead, it is a matter of what Feral Faun, now popping up in this journal as Wolfi Landstreicher, calls "post-civilization 'wildness'" in the piece "How Then Do We Go Feral?" Here he suggests that:

"*the practise of wildness must be for us a perpetual experimentation, which incorporates the willful creation of each moment of one's life for oneself and the willful rejection, through destructive action, of authority in all it's forms — and, thus, of domestication and civilization as we know it.*"

Landstreicher thinks of "going wild" as an "insurrectionary practice" and this more than explains why it was the insurrectionary anarchist, Alfredo Bonanno, who wrote the introduction to the book I earlier quoted from. But that idea of the wild as insurrection (against a colonising civilisation characterised by domestication) should be taken seriously – as Landstreicher explains in his opening two paragraphs:

"*The destruction of civilization — the network of relationships encompassing the state, economy, technology, religion, the family, all forms of authority and control — the overturning of domestication — for me, these are revolutionary aims, guidelines towards a way of living in insurrection against the present. Though expressed negatively, there is a*

positive vision behind this negation. This positive vision can be spoken of in terms of 'wildness.' But wildness — especially as an aim for individuals to achieve in revolt against domestication and civilization — is an unknown quality. As an anarchist, I am glad about this. There can be no experts in human wildness, no leaders to take us there (not even the comrade who has lived in the forest for the last fifteen years, viewing it through such civilized ideological lenses as 'Nature', 'Mother Earth', 'the circle of Life', even 'wilderness' or 'ecological balance' and seeing himself as the judge of who does or does not know 'wildness'.) For anyone who can read this and are, thus, clearly civilized beings, wildness is a concept, an idea, which can inspire revolt; but this potential to inspire revolt does not spring from an answer this idea may seem to provide (like any liberatory idea which has not slipped into ideology, it provides no answers) but from the questions it raises, the problems it opens up."

This insurrection is not a parody of the wild, however, it is not imitation of something conjured and imagined. It is not "getting back to" something or copying the lifestyles of others as Landstreicher makes clear here:

"*Our exploration of the question of human wildness can, of course, include the examination of what we know about non-civilized people and how they have lived, with the realization that all such knowledge has been filtered through such scientific lenses of civilization as anthropology and paleontology. We must avoid delusions of imitating or 'going back to' the way of life of these people. Even if we chose to attempt such an imitation, it would be an imitation of the static image of such a people presented to us by our civilized lenses rather than a re-living of the dynamic of real natural-social relationships of these people. What is best learned from the examination of anthropological studies of uncivilized people is that*

people have been able to live and live well without all the supposed conveniences provided by the complex of social and technological systems that is civilization."

What is actually required, then, is simple insurrection, revolt from and against civilisation. But not as the creation of some alternative civilisation or some new improved form of domestication, one that, so we imagine, has better aims and goals. It is one constituted simply in and through authentic wildness. We are to live as living insurrection and as the (literal) embodiment of the wild, resisting attempts to narrativise what we are doing (or what we are doing it for) and resisting attempts to institutionalise either our lives or the lives of any others. We are to live other than as civilisation dictates and to create relationships according to the logic of the wild rather than the logic of civilisation.

The final person I want to discuss in this chapter may, at first, seem strange but I believe he is saying things in his infamous manifesto which are pertinent to my discussion here which is about the wild and its rhetorical opposite, civilisation. That person is Ted Kaczynski, otherwise known as the Unabomber, someone identified by the American state as an actual terrorist. In 1995, using his codename "FC" (which was short for "Freedom Club" and was often also engraved into the bombs he made and mailed to people), his manifesto "Industrial Society and Its Future" was published. It is, in the judgment of many, a text quite far from the rantings of a madman (which people often want actual terrorists to be since they cannot deal with the thought that terrorists might be sane people, actually have a point, or even have good ideas). Often, in fact, it is the rhetorical position of elected governments, or other rhetorically legitimate authorities, that terrorists are automatically wrong in their rationalities and logics for it must a priori be the case that this is so. Not only must such people then be rejected as people, their rationality must be rejected as well. Kaczynski had been active for several years before his manifesto finally

was published so we can only imagine that its contents consist of something of a mature philosophy of his.

Kaczynski's manifesto consists of several headed sections across 232 numbered paragraphs. It concerns the future of society and comes from what Kaczynski describes in paragraph 214 as "a movement that exalts nature and opposes technology". We might describe it very generally as against society as it is currently constructed in much of the West although Kaczynski's own experience is obviously uniquely American (and it is certainly the case that all of the West is not like America). More specifically, it is a certain technosocial conglomeration and direction for society that Kaczynski seeks to destroy and rails against in his manifesto – which is to say that it is technology and its social uses together in their consequences which is what he focuses on. When technological society begins to require arbitrary organisation on a mass scale then that technology changes social (and so natural) reality. (Put in other terms we might say that an argument can be made that at such a point its wildness is artificially retarded or interfered with.) Kaczynski is then concerned with the character of how society progresses or maintains itself and the consequences of that for everything else. For example, consider paragraph 209:

"*The reason why technology has seemed always to progress is that, until perhaps a century or two before the Industrial Revolution, most technology was small-scale technology. But most of the technology developed since the Industrial Revolution is organization-dependent technology. Take the refrigerator for example. Without factory-made parts or the facilities of a post-industrial machine shop it would be virtually impossible for a handful of local craftsmen to build a refrigerator. If by some miracle they did succeed in building one it would be useless to them without a reliable source of electric power. So they would have to dam a stream and build a generator. Generators require large amounts of copper wire.*

Imagine trying to make that wire without modern machinery. And where would they get a gas suitable for refrigeration? It would be much easier to build an icehouse or preserve food by drying or pickling, as was done before the invention of the refrigerator."

This seems to perfectly illustrate Kaczynski's grievance in one concise example. It is a grievance against "organization-dependent technology" which is "technology that depends on large-scale social organization". Such organization seems equally to draw Kaczynski's ire, in fact, which is why another thing he warns against in his manifesto is "Leftism". The aforementioned paragraph 214 explains this for us:

"*a movement that exalts nature and opposes technology must take a resolutely anti-leftist stance and must avoid all collaboration with leftists. Leftism is in the long run inconsistent with wild nature, with human freedom and with the elimination of modern technology. Leftism is collectivist; it seeks to bind together the entire world (both nature and the human race) into a unified whole. But this implies management of nature and of human life by organized society, and it requires advanced technology. You can't have a united world without rapid long-distance transportation and communication, you can't make all people love one another without sophisticated psychological techniques, you can't have a 'planned society' without the necessary technological base. Above all, leftism is driven by the need for power, and the leftist seeks power on a collective basis, through identification with a mass movement or an organization. Leftism is unlikely ever to give up technology, because technology is too valuable a source of collective power.*"

What is wrong with Leftism is that it is forced organisation, forced collectivity. It bypasses what Kaczynski seems to regard as a wild autonomy, agency or voluntarism. (That is to say – absolutely – that neither Leftism, Socialism, Communism nor Anarchism, as political

dogmas, are in any way “wild” or redolent of wildness.) In the very next paragraph (215) he praises “the anarchist” because, in their power seeking, it is “on an individual or small-group basis” and for the purposes of self-organisation. In Kaczynski’s mind here the anarchist (whom elsewhere he disdains and despises) is one who equally opposes “large organizations”. This hits one of Kaczynski’s keynotes which is in praise of the individual or small group over the large organisation which, when it is large enough, becomes “the industrial system”, a forced homogeneity. In breaking that homogeneity Kaczynski imagines to empower these much smaller social units which he regards as having much more integrity. Consequently, he argues that destroying the technology which enables such a mass technosocial reality should be “the only goal” of social revolutionaries where the stated goal is “to destroy the existing form of society”. But this is the idea negatively put. More positively, Kaczynski says (paragraphs 183 and 184):

“*an ideology, in order to gain enthusiastic support, must have a positive ideal as well as a negative one; it must be FOR something as well as AGAINST something. The positive ideal that we propose is Nature. That is, WILD nature: Those aspects of the functioning of the Earth and its living things that are independent of human management and free of human interference and control. And with wild nature we include human nature, by which we mean those aspects of the functioning of the human individual that are not subject to regulation by organized society but are products of chance, or free will, or God (depending on your religious or philosophical opinions).*

Nature makes a perfect counter-ideal to technology for several reasons. Nature (that which is outside the power of the system) is the opposite of technology (which seeks to expand indefinitely the power of the system). Most people will agree that nature is beautiful; certainly it has tremendous popular appeal. The radical environmentalists ALREADY hold an

ideology that exalts nature and opposes technology. It is not necessary for the sake of nature to set up some chimerical utopia or any new kind of social order. Nature takes care of itself: It was a spontaneous creation that existed long before any human society, and for countless centuries many different kinds of human societies coexisted with nature without doing it an excessive amount of damage. Only with the Industrial Revolution did the effect of human society on nature become really devastating. To relieve the pressure on nature it is not necessary to create a special kind of social system, it is only necessary to get rid of industrial society. Granted, this will not solve all problems. Industrial society has already done tremendous damage to nature and it will take a very long time for the scars to heal. Besides, even preindustrial societies can do significant damage to nature. Nevertheless, getting rid of industrial society will accomplish a great deal. It will relieve the worst of the pressure on nature so that the scars can begin to heal. It will remove the capacity of organized society to keep increasing its control over nature (including human nature). Whatever kind of society may exist after the demise of the industrial system, it is certain that most people will live close to nature, because in the absence of advanced technology there is no other way that people CAN live. To feed themselves they must be peasants, or herdsmen, or fishermen, or hunters, etc. And, generally speaking, local autonomy should tend to increase, because lack of advanced technology and rapid communications will limit the capacity of governments or other large organizations to control local communities."

Kaczynski claims that his project is not political but, of course, it is. It is intimately to do with the organisation, or not, of human relationships and that is really all politics actually is: the regulation of relationships. When he eulogises "wild nature" as the answer he is taking a stand against arbitrary human civilisation, against the removal or breeding out of a wild DNA from the character of our lives and relationships. He is taking a stance against a scientistic, all-powerful, all-controlling, rationalistic humanism that is "unaware of (or

choose[s] to ignore) the fact that when large changes, even seemingly beneficial ones, are introduced into a society, they lead to a long sequence of other changes, most of which are impossible to predict" (170). He points out that "yesterday's science fiction is today's fact. The Industrial Revolution has radically altered man's environment and way of life, and it is only to be expected that as technology is increasingly applied to the human body and mind, man himself will be altered as radically as his environment and way of life have been" (160). This same point can be politically actuated in a further way: "If a society needs a large, powerful law enforcement establishment, then there is something gravely wrong with that society; it must be subjecting people to severe pressures if so many refuse to follow the rules, or follow them only because forced. Many societies in the past have gotten by with little or no formal law-enforcement" (footnote to paragraph 147). Thus, he builds a political principle: "it is NOT in the interest of the system to preserve freedom or small-group autonomy. On the contrary, it is in the interest of the system to bring human behavior under control to the greatest possible extent" (139).

What Kaczynski actually seems in favour of (and so which, consequently, also becomes that thing he imagines the technosocial society is suppressing) may be regarded in anarchist terms as agency, autonomy and free association. (He calls it "man's fate being in his own hands".) So:

"*all these technical advances taken together have created a world in which the average man's fate is no longer in his own hands or in the hands of his neighbors and friends, but in those of politicians, corporation executives and remote, anonymous technicians and bureaucrats whom he as an individual has no power to influence*" (128; see also 59-76).

Consequently, it seems a fundamental argument of the Unabomber, Ted Kaczynski, that people in general have been conned into believing that lots of technologically-achieved conveniences are more important than an individual human being's personal autonomy and freedom to organise their own life. And in that, I must say, he was not wrong. Freedom was stolen from us and given to politicians and, worse, CEOs and they will either doom us or we will fight back with our bare hands for that freedom, that wild freedom Kaczynski identifies with the ability to organise the course of one's own life together, or not, with those one chooses to. Kaczynski even provides a short example to motivate this:

"*Since many people may find paradoxical the notion that a large number of good things (i.e. the products of technological and industrial society) can add up to a bad thing, we illustrate with an analogy. Suppose Mr. A is playing chess with Mr. B. Mr. C, a grand master, is looking over Mr. A's shoulder. Mr. A of course wants to win his game, so if Mr. C points out a good move for him to make, he is doing Mr. A a favor. But suppose now that Mr. C tells Mr. A how to make ALL of his moves. In each particular instance he does Mr. A a favor by showing him his best move, but by making ALL of his moves for him he spoils his game, since there is no point in Mr. A's playing the game at all if someone else makes all his moves. The situation of modern man is analogous to that of Mr. A. The system makes an individual's life easier for him in innumerable ways, but in doing so it deprives him of control over his own fate.*" (Footnote to 128)

It may be seen in all this that Kaczynski is making the argument that the technological-industrial social system is both bad for human freedom and was also never set up to provide for it in the first place. In fact, Kaczynski makes the explicit point that such a system "CANNOT EXIST TO SATISFY HUMAN NEEDS" (119, emphasis mine). Even where it does so, this is only because it services the system to do so. An American health care

provider provides health care – but only because an American health care provider's CEO gets rich by so doing. The point is this system demands absolute integration. One cannot have just a little bit of the technological-industrial social system for it both demands all of you and to control everything whilst also changing social relations across the board: "It is simply taken for granted that everyone must bow to technical necessity" (119). This is to say that for techno-industrial capitalism to work at all it must be impossible for as many people as possible to live free (in senses relational and financial) of it. So incarceration is a feature not a bug of the technological-industrial-capitalist situation. In short, this is a COERCIVE system AND MUST NECESSARILY BE SO as explained by Kaczynski in paragraph 117:

"*In any technologically advanced society the individual's fate MUST depend on decisions that he personally cannot influence to any great extent. A technological society cannot be broken down into small, autonomous communities, because production depends on the cooperation of very large numbers of people and machines. Such a society MUST be highly organized and decisions HAVE TO be made that affect very large numbers of people. When a decision affects, say, a million people, then each of the affected individuals has, on the average, only a one-millionth share in making the decision. What usually happens in practice is that decisions are made by public officials or corporation executives, or by technical specialists, but even when the public votes on a decision the number of voters ordinarily is too large for the vote of anyone individual to be significant. Thus most individuals are unable to influence measurably the major decisions that affect their lives. There is no conceivable way to remedy this in a technologically advanced society. The system tries to 'solve' this problem by using propaganda to make people WANT the decisions that have been made for them, but even if this 'solution' were completely successful in making people feel better, it would be demeaning.*"

Kaczynski adds that in a society like this people will be forced to conform to it. If it needs "scientists, mathematicians and engineers" (115) then its children will be guided into becoming these things rather than other things since the children serve as the future facilitators of the system's continuance. This is not accidental; it is the system acting precisely as a system and contrary to the dictates of wild freedom. It promulgates obedience and servitude rather than a sense of independence and voluntary cooperation. This is important for Kaczynski for it leads him to come to the conclusion that such a civilisation cannot be reformed for it will not allow itself to be reformed since such reformation would actually be that system's destruction. Consequently (111):

"*There has been a consistent tendency, going back at least to the Industrial Revolution, for technology to strengthen the system at a high cost in individual freedom and local autonomy. Hence any change designed to protect freedom from technology would be contrary to a fundamental trend in the development of our society. Consequently, such a change either would be a transitory one—soon swamped by the tide of history—or, if large enough to be permanent, would alter the nature of our whole society... Thus, permanent changes in favor of freedom could be brought about only by persons prepared to accept radical, dangerous and unpredictable alteration of the entire system. In other words by revolutionaries, not reformers.*"

Kaczynski's point here, with which I agree, is that you cannot have just a piece of wildness – neither can the techno-industrial social system tolerate wildness in the midst of it. One must drive out the other in both directions which leaves us contemplating two opposing and antagonistic forces. This conclusion follows on, in Kaczynski's manifesto, from the enumeration of five "principles of history", the most interesting of which are the fourth and fifth, that "you cannot plan out a new form of society in advance" and that societies

are not rationally chosen, they are consequent on “processes of social evolution” that are “not under rational human control”. As I might parse this, life (which is wild) is NOT a scientific object to be technologically manipulated with microscopic precision. It has imperatives of its own that are not subject to control (or even necessarily to the senses). Life, in my view because it is self-organisation which is the spark of wildness that constitutes it, escapes being reduced to a mere object ripe for complete control that the technosocial society requires it to be. Moreover, the way that the modern scientific rationalist has constructed the human being, with its rationality and morals and imagined responsibilities, is patently false and absolutely partisan and self-serving. In wanting to put all human beings into the same very convenient (and politically useful) boat it falsifies the wild in us and overplays its hand. In that situation the simple truth of wild diversity is bound to show the technosocial rationalist picture up for the freedom-denying lie that it actually is. As Kaczynski then rightfully asks (97): “What kind of freedom does one have if one can only use it as someone else prescribes?” Here Kaczynski gets to the heart of a very important question, one that divides civilisation from the wild and vice versa. In talking about “constitutional rights” (97) he says:

“*Constitutional rights are useful up to a point, but they do not serve to guarantee much more than what might be called the bourgeois conception of freedom. According to the bourgeois conception, a ‘free’ man is essentially an element of a social machine and has only a certain set of prescribed and delimited freedoms; freedoms that are designed to serve the needs of the social machine more than those of the individual.*”

And so we can ask a general question here: what kind of freedom can you imagine, a wild freedom or a bourgeois freedom? Which is actually more free and what are the conditions upon these kinds of freedom? Do you think freedom consists in “constitutionally

guaranteed rights" or do you agree with Kaczynski that "The degree of personal freedom that exists in a society is determined more by the economic and technological structure of the society than by its laws or its form of government"? It is to be remembered here that bourgeois freedom relies on "efficient mechanisms for enforcing the ruler's will… modern, well-organized police forces… rapid long-distance communications… surveillance cameras... dossiers of information about the lives of average citizens." The wild lacks all of these things and hence, in the more wild past, "it was relatively easy to evade control." And isn't freedom about being able to evade control in pursuance of your own self-organisation following a wild principle of life itself? Isn't wild freedom about choosing your own responsibilities rather than having others impose responsibilities upon you? Kaczynski defines freedom in the following way (94):

"*By 'freedom' we mean the opportunity to go through the power process, with real goals not the artificial goals of surrogate activities, and without interference, manipulation or supervision from anyone, especially from any large organization. Freedom means being in control (either as an individual or as a member of a SMALL group) of the life-and-death issues of one's existence: food, clothing, shelter and defense against whatever threats there may be in one's environment. Freedom means having power; not the power to control other people but the power to control the circumstances of one's own life. One does not have freedom if anyone else (especially a large organization) has power over one, no matter how benevolently, tolerantly and permissively that power may be exercised.*"

Interestingly, Kaczynski sees this as contradictory to technology's driver, science (92):

"*science marches on blindly, without regard to the real welfare of the human race or to any other standard, obedient only to the psychological needs of the scientists and of the government officials and corporation executives who provide the funds for research.*"

As conclusion, Kaczynski is of the mind that the techno-industrial society is "servitude" – and must be so. Bourgeois conceptions of freedom are actually semantic traps and physical prisons whose reality is policing, surveillance, coercion and centralising power concentrated in large scale organisations and institutions with their own political and economic imperatives. This form of society, Kaczynski suggests, is not actually fulfilling for most people and is full of "surrogate activities" by which they attempt to satisfy themselves. Yet Kaczynski seems to imagine this inauthentic and artificial rather than something genuine. In fact (86):

"*even if most people in industrial-technological society were well satisfied, we (FC) would still be opposed to that form of society, because (among other reasons) we consider it demeaning to fulfil one's need for the power process through surrogate activities or through identification with an organization, rather than through pursuit of real goals.*"

By "real goals" here Kaczynski seems to mean "self-articulated goals uncoerced by others, especially organisations" and they are connected to his psychology of the human being largely detailed in paragraphs 59-76 of his manifesto headed "Disruption of the Power Process in Modern Society". Here (59) Kaczynski divides human drives into three groups, those easy to satisfy, those satisfiable with some effort and those that cannot be satisfied regardless of effort. What Kaczynski then calls "the power process" is related to the second grouping (and it seems psychologically important to him that human beings put as many of their drives as possible into that second category since it is potentially the most

rewarding. Everyone knows the feeling of satisfaction that comes from applying some effort to a successfully completed task.) Kaczynski's point is then that where enough tasks of the life one lives do not fall into category two quite naturally then artificial or "surrogate" activities have to be invented to produce the desired satisfaction and psychological credit. Yet this is not a "real" life but an artificially constructed one in which one tries (or is forced) to manufacture psychological satisfaction by being told or persuaded to believe that what one should actually desire is what techno-industrial society demands of you (63): "Modern man must satisfy his need for the power process largely through pursuit of the artificial needs created by the advertising and marketing industry and through surrogate activities." One should then not wonder at the oft-remarked "pointlessness" or "purposelessness" of modern life which many have criticised as negatively nihilistic, vacuous or as an "identity crisis" for modern humanity. Why is it so many modern Westerners need to seek "fulfillment" in various extraneous activities? Kaczynski would suggest it is because techno-industrial civilisation is actually not fulfilling, or psychologically wholesome, in itself in a way that a more wild life of personally-chosen responsibilities would be.

Important in that, is that one be able to choose one's goals (i.e. live one's life) AUTONOMOUSLY (a characteristic of the wild). Kaczynski regards this as a psychologically healthy necessity but finds that the techno-industrial society actively goes out of its way to frustrate such a psychological need (65-66):

"*where goals are pursued through earning money, climbing the status ladder or functioning as part of the system in some other way, most people are not in a position to pursue their goals AUTONOMOUSLY. Most workers are someone else's employee and, as we pointed out in paragraph 61, must spend their days doing what they are told to do in the way they are*

told to do it. Even most people who are in business for themselves have only limited autonomy. It is a chronic complaint of small-business persons and entrepreneurs that their hands are tied by excessive government regulation. Some of these regulations are doubtless unnecessary, but for the most part government regulations are essential and inevitable parts of our extremely complex society. A large portion of small business today operates on the franchise system. It was reported in the Wall Street Journal a few years ago that many of the franchise-granting companies require applicants for franchises to take a personality test that is designed to EXCLUDE those who have creativity and initiative, because such persons are not sufficiently docile to go along obediently with the franchise system. This excludes from small business many of the people who most need autonomy. Today people live more by virtue of what the system does FOR them or TO them than by virtue of what they do for themselves. And what they do for themselves is done more and more along channels laid down by the system. Opportunities tend to be those that the system provides, the opportunities must be exploited in accord with the rules and regulations and techniques prescribed by experts must be followed if there is to be a chance of success."

This is clearly all more in service of the system than in service of human individuals or communities. As a consequence, Kaczynski suggests that most human drives fall into either categories 1 or 3, and not 2, leading to a problem at the heart of the psychology of modern humanity. This can be contrasted (not uncontroversially or without some rhetorical oversimplicity) with so-called “primitive man” who, if perhaps less physically secure from things like disease, was not necessarily less psychologically secure since such a human being was required to take care of themselves. There were no safety nets or social systems to save them and what they did not do for themselves was just not done.

By comparison, modern human beings are threatened by many things, products of the techno-industrial system, against which they are helpless (68): “nuclear accidents, carcinogens in food, environmental pollution, war, increasing taxes, invasion of [their] privacy by large organizations, nationwide social or economic phenomena that may disrupt [their] way of life.” No one is ever perfectly secure in every respect, of course, but someone who simply has to rely on themselves or the small group of which they are voluntarily a part, can, as Kaczynski puts it, “stoically” accept what is beyond them. Modern human beings, however, have to accept that many of the things they face are entirely unnecessary and “man-made” and happening at the behest of others whom they have no relationship with whatsoever. As Kaczynski then says (68): “They are not the results of chance but are IMPOSED on him by other persons whose decisions he, as an individual, is unable to influence.” If a bear in the woods attacks and kills you that is unfortunate but understandable. But what if you die from being consistently poisoned by the food you eat or the water you drink which is full of the various pollutants produced by techno-industrial capitalism entirely for private profit and to which you were habituated? Kaczynski’s point is that your own life has then been taken out of your hands – which is a further, and unnecessary, injury the techno-industrial civilisation we inhabit forces you to bear. Modern, techno-industrial-capitalist society is essentially a concatenation of coercions which force a form of life on all but the most independently stubborn of us (73):

“*Behavior is regulated not only through explicit rules and not only by the government. Control is often exercised through indirect coercion or through psychological pressure or manipulation, and by organizations other than the government, or by the system as a whole. Most large organizations use some form of propaganda to manipulate public attitudes or behavior. Propaganda is not limited to ‘commercials’ and advertisements, and*

sometimes it is not even consciously intended as propaganda by the people who make it. For instance, the content of entertainment programming is a powerful form of propaganda. An example of indirect coercion: There is no law that says we have to go to work every day and follow our employer's orders. Legally there is nothing to prevent us from going to live in the wild like primitive people or from going into business for ourselves. But in practice there is very little wild country left, and there is room in the economy for only a limited number of small business owners. Hence most of us can survive only as someone else's employee."

Of course, it was not always like this and Kaczynski makes this argument too (48-49):

"*It is well known that crowding increases stress and aggression. The degree of crowding that exists today and the isolation of man from nature are consequences of technological progress. All preindustrial societies were predominantly rural. The Industrial Revolution vastly increased the size of cities and the proportion of the population that lives in them, and modern agricultural technology has made it possible for the Earth to support a far denser population than it ever did before. (Also, technology exacerbates the effects of crowding because it puts increased disruptive powers in people's hands. For example, a variety of noise-making devices: power mowers, radios, motorcycles, etc. If the use of these devices is unrestricted, people who want peace and quiet are frustrated by the noise. If their use is restricted, people who use the devices are frustrated by the regulations. But if these machines had never been invented there would have been no conflict and no frustration generated by them.)*

For primitive societies the natural world (which usually changes only slowly) provided a stable framework and therefore a sense of security. In the modern world it is human society

that dominates nature rather than the other way around, and modern society changes very rapidly owing to technological change. Thus there is no stable framework."

As final conclusion to Kaczynski's arguments I then in fact offer his opening paragraph (1):

"*The Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race. They have greatly increased the life expectancy of those of us who live in 'advanced' countries, but they have destabilized society, have made life unfulfilling, have subjected human beings to indignities, have led to widespread psychological suffering (in the Third World to physical suffering as well) and have inflicted severe damage on the natural world. The continued development of technology will worsen the situation. It will certainly subject human beings to greater indignities and inflict greater damage on the natural world, it will probably lead to greater social disruption and psychological suffering, and it may lead to increased physical suffering even in 'advanced' countries.*"

But that Kaczynski then said in his fourth paragraph "This is not to be a POLITICAL revolution. Its object will be to overthrow not governments but the economic and technological basis of the present society" was exceptionally naive on his part. Which "governments" did he imagine would not resist him and so consequently be required to be overthrown as well? Of all the people he discussed in his manifesto, those in government are those who have drunk, and actively promote, the koolaid of the techno-industrial society most of all. The recent UK Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, for example, did nothing but privilege the forces of techno-industrialist society whilst pontificating about the necessity of "economic growth". When anyone even engaged in mild protest against techno-industrial economic interests his thugs bounded into action to arrest and imprison the perpetrators. And Starmer is not even particularly extreme but would imagine himself

a solid centrist, a leader of the mainstream of Western civilisation rather than an unhinged outlier like orange others. The reasonable conclusion can only be that, in wanting to wipe away the economic and technological basis of this current civilisation, one would necessarily need to dismantle its political basis too. In fact, all three are visibly connected by observable material relations and in acting with wildness upon these relations exactly in order to "re-wild" them, one reconstitutes them too in the act.

In this chapter I have been providing notes and fragments of ideas towards a particular thought. This thought is that "the wild" or "wildness" is an all-encompassing context or situation – for everything. It is a theatre of LIBERTARIAN NIHILISM which is also known as ANARCHY. Any and all order and any and all chaos is here in this one imaginary. If we take our lead from Henry David Thoreau we may even be able to imagine that this thought inspires a politics in which nature's autonomy – a matter of "absolute freedom and wildness" in Thoreau's words – takes centre stage. Robert Macfarlane, the nature writer who in the book I discussed above gives us the imaginary of a river to think about, similarly describes the wild there as "autonomous liveliness" and this is once again suggestive, bringing together, as it does, the ideas of autonomy and life so intimately.

This is contrasted with a civilised world painted as incarcerating, exploitative and obsessed with death, contrary to principles of life and autonomy. Its theme is domestication where the wild is anti-domestication, both material and imaginary. Technology, a product of industrial civilisation, is imagined as generally and serially confining – defining how we must live and restricting freedom. Technologically-enabled modern civilised life engages in techniques of containment, distraction and disablement in order to produce incarcerating lives for its inhabitants. This even extends to our language which is used against us to domesticate nature and ideas of "the wild" in order

to limit our exposure to, or experience of, actual authentic wildness, that wildness which constitutes us at the material-imaginal level and which can be articulated in and through us at any time by means of a “potential free-spiritedness” – as Feral Faun puts it.

I had, in fact, already made reference to this in my last book by making the totem of the wild Dionysos, the mad god of unhinged wildness and vegetation. As such, the wild is not being imagined here as a place governed by reason, logic or narrative. This is why it is being imagined as a libertarian nihilism, in fact. It is nihilism because the wild is simply becoming as an independent and interdependent autonomy, a concatenation or rhizome of freely evolving relations. It is libertarian because, without logic, reason or narrative, and also without purpose, it is simply becoming once again – and that by means of Thoreau’s “absolute freedom and wildness” or Macfarlane’s “autonomous liveliness”. I am saying, then, that there is no metanarrative to any of this and that to impose one outside of, or beyond, oneself is violence, an act of war, in a reality that is simply proceeding by multitudinous examples of autonomy. It is to that I now turn in my final chapter of introduction.

4. The Politics of Everyday Life

"*What is freedom? To have the will to be responsible for oneself.*" (Max Stirner)

Libertarian nihilism. Autonomy. Freely evolving relations. There is no metanarrative to any of this. "The wild" – as an imaginary – is a void. Nothing.

Let us consider a question and let that question be "How should we live?", the kind of ethical and political question relevant to our subject. This question is naturally set in the context of "the wild" which is regarded as a political and ethical context of consequence. This, in turn, follows on from the observation that for the Cynics (to which I will come in much more detail in due course within this chapter) the answer to my question is "according to nature". This is an answer I take seriously as I hope this book will show. But, as you can see, such an answer rests on what you imagine "nature" is and where it is coming from.

For Michel Foucault the universality of "nature" was really just the historical and contingent created in our thought, perhaps something (like everything) a matter of "power relations".

For Jacques Derrida that we imagine as nature was actually the prejudices of language, not least a metaphysics of presence implicit within it.

For Friedrich Nietzsche "nature" was simply our interpretative acts and interpretation, a survival mechanism or natural endowment that is all we have which imagines a world for us to live in.

For Gilles Deleuze “nature” was consequent on a philosophy fixated with knowledge and identity which creates it.

For Jean-Paul Sartre "nature" resulted from being ontological and imagining essences. But, as we know, he thought existence, lived experience, precedes essence. And we can at least see that would give a different understanding (so creating another way of being in the world).

All five of these philosophers imply that what we have taken for nature, as we have taken it to be, is based on an error in thought, a making universal or setting in stone, which leads to its own ossifying consequences.

My problematic, taking all this onboard, is this: what if, as I have said, “the wild”, nature, is a place of no narrative, something beyond interpretation in the metaphysical or totalising ways humans try to take it? What if it is epistemologically unverifiable, slippery, ever-changing? What if, in a way we might describe as queer, it resists classification, functions in an outlaw way outside it? How might we live in a wild that cannot be tamed, that does not submit to anyone’s overarching story, that has no story to tell of its own and, in fact, ANNIHILATES all stories?

There can be a supplementary question to this: Nature for a human being, in a pragmatic sense, is an intellectual appreciation of surroundings made, one imagines, for survival purposes. One needs to know where and how one is at any given time and consequently makes (hopefully informed) assumptions accordingly. "Nature" is, thus, a function of humanity (from our perspective). Could we live at all without it being this?

Keep these questions in mind in the discussion that follows. I shall hope to readdress them somehow after that discussion at the end.

The following comes from academic Saul Newman and his book *Postanarchism* from 2016 which I am going to be interacting with for the next several pages:

"*where do we look for signs of hope? Despite the apparent bleakness of the current moment, this book does not counsel pessimism or despair. Rather, its aim is to explore the contours of a new kind of political terrain, one that is opened up by* ***the nihilism of the contemporary condition****. I want to suggest that, notwithstanding the ambiguous and dangerous ground that we stand on and the seemingly insurmountable nature of the powers we confront, we are nevertheless witness to the emergence of a new paradigm of radical political thought and action, one that takes the form of* ***an autonomous insurrection****. Let me be bolder still and say that, if we turn our gaze away from the empty spectacle of sovereign politics, we can glimpse an alternative and dissenting world of political life and action which can only be described as anarchistic. By this I intend to convey the idea of* ***a mode of politics in which self-government and free and spontaneous organization, rather than organization by and through the state****, are central.*" (bold mine)

Newman's context is existence and activity (otherwise known as prosperous survival) in the contemporary world of today even as mine in this book is the development of a "wild" imaginary of that same situation and wild values and habits of action to accompany it. He wishes to develop a consciously poststructuralist interpretation of anarchy which he dubs

“postanarchism” and to argue that it is, in effect, a survival strategy with its own set of values and a consciously anarchist approach to the living of life itself. This is, in fact, something I have interacted with at length in previous books before. As I re-read it again now, however, I see in it what I now regard as impetus to my “wild” imaginary, something which informs and helps to produce and encourage the values and action the wild seems to impel. In short, we need to reappraise Newman’s postanarchism.

There is no getting around the fact that, in short, postanarchism is the anarchism of autonomy. In many respects it is a philosophy (in the wholly active, barely theoretical, Diogenean sense) of being autonomous in a social world. In this general sense this makes the kind of “post”-anarchy Newman describes very much a post-institutional one. It is about “the invention of alternative autonomous political spaces and practices”. It looks towards “new forms of political community”. It is about people who don’t automatically look to the government to solve their problems but, rather, is about people who look to themselves as government’s better and more appropriate replacement. Basically, insert “autonomy” into every political context and ask how that changes things (and, not least of all, how that changes you). Newman describes the people he is talking about as those who “embody the desire for autonomous and sustainable life which no longer bears the imprint of the state.”

Newman’s first chapter of *Postanarchism* crafts a narrative of anarchism from its regularly described nineteenth century inception to the present day. It is described here as a “political heresy” in that one simple way to describe it is as that political belief which amounts to saying that the way the world has been organised – into nation states with governments that is regarded as normal politics – is illegitimate to the point of being something which the general populace should revolt against if they value their freedom

at all. Anarchism, as a political belief, is thus the view that all nations and all governments (with the necessary political centralism that they imply) are invalid and should thus be resisted with a mind to their complete dissolution. Or, put it more simply, “the state has no rational or moral justification” and “its order is inherently oppressive and violent”. Moreover, “life can function perfectly well without this encumbrance” (which is possibly one reason why, today, states everywhere won’t let life go on without it). In Newman’s take, anarchism develops and comes more sharply into focus as a result of the split between the followers of Marx and those of Bakunin in the International Workingmen’s Association in the early 1870s. What can be seen there on Bakunin’s anarchist side is that “the revolution must be libertarian in means as well as ends”. This is to say that freedom must not simply be the end goal. It must also be how you get there. In essence, of course, this means that freedom is not a goal at all but a means of living you can and should begin practicing right here, right now, today, as the ethical and political best practice. Newman himself can put this more formally:

“*anarchism is a form of politics and ethics which takes the value of human freedom and self-government – inextricably linked to equality – as central and sees authoritarian and hierarchical relations – those enshrined not only in the state, but also in capitalism, organized religion, patriarchy, even certain forms of technology – as external limitations and encumbrances upon human freedom. There is a central opposition within the anarchist imaginary between social relations, which, in their ‘natural’ state, are freely formed and self-regulating, and external structures of power and authority – most prominently the sovereign state – which interfere with these spontaneous social processes and relations, corrupting and distorting them, imprinting upon them artificial, hierarchical and oppressive relations in which human life is alienated.*”

So what we are talking about, in my own terms, here is a “wild” which is artificially and violently imposed upon by states with their governments (“civilisation”) which are engines of coercion and oppression and deniers of freedom and autonomy. “The state, this infernal machine of domination and violence, justified neither by religious illusions nor by liberal artifices like the social contract, nor even by modern democratic notions of consent, is the chief obstacle to human freedom and development,” says Newman. Bakunin, as Newman reminds us, then labels the state “a vast slaughterhouse” – and he is not wrong, as anyone’s TV screen or mobile phone will daily witness today. So anarchy, in Newman’s retelling, functions, in the context of modern, Western politics, as that spark which urges the “revolutionary transformation of social relations” in “an insurrectionary form of politics in which people autonomously transform their own lives and relations outside the immediate control of the state.” Note the “autonomously” there for, as just suggested, if freedom is not merely an end but also its means *then autonomy of action, action on your own recognisance, is key to the success or failure of this idea*.

The thing about making autonomy the key, however, is that it is – NECESSARILY – completely open-ended. Without compromise or condition. IT IS THE UNGOVERNABLE. It is like a wild which has no gods or masters, no arbitrating plan or pre-determined end point or fundamental oversight. One cannot grant autonomy for autonomy is simply taken and acted upon but one can also not concede autonomy and then add “but”. Autonomy knows no “buts”. There is autonomy or there is not. One acts in autonomy or one does not. So if one values autonomy most of all then even anarchy itself cannot become a dogma or doctrine to bind it. For only living beings can be or act autonomously according to their needs, desires, inclinations and values. Inasmuch as anarchism is or became a set of stipulations, it strayed (and may still stray) from autonomy which is really the postanarchist interpretational point of focus. Most immediately what this does in

historical and political terms is interpret anarchism becoming postanarchism as the death of the revolutionary metanarrative beloved of socialists and others which, it must be admitted, even consumed and misled anarchist notables of the past as well. This postanarchist focus on autonomy questions their judgment, and the metanarrative upon which they base it, that in social revolution and overarching rational social organisation is freedom from oppression and coercion to be found.

In Newman's analysis this has ontological ramifications. This is to say that it concerns our being and becoming, how and what we are, and our conception and practice of ourselves in the reality we imagine to participate in. In postanarchist guise this can never be a matter of "first principles" or metaphilosophical "grounds" since the reality postanarchism imagines is indeterminate and contingent in any case. Rather:

"*in freeing our experience from the authority of guiding first principles, a certain space is opened up for undetermined free thought and action: questions such as 'what should we do?', 'how should we think?', take on a new and singular urgency as we are confronted with the uncertainty of the ground beneath our feet. The moment of ontological anarchy is thus an experience of freedom and, indeed, intense ethical reflection. Importantly, it also frees action from its telos, from the rule of ends, from the strategic rationality which always sought to determine it. Action becomes 'anarchic' – that is to say, groundless and without predetermined ends.*"

Newman's own encapsulation of such thought is that "there is no Project of Projects that determines all the others" and that might seem to leave us nowhere with no one to tell us what to do or how to behave. But that is sort of the point. If there is no one and nothing then autonomy, telling yourself what to do and where to go and what for, being self-

organisational, self-actualising and self-determining, is all that's left and is the only way to proceed. Newman's suggestion is that "autonomous thinking and acting... transforms… social spaces" – and that in a liberatory direction to boot. This approach extends to "power" as well which is seen as "being grounded in... its own historical contingency" – and in nothing else. This point of view on power "divests power of any claim to universal right, truth, legitimacy or inevitability" as part of an emphasis on anarchy itself (perhaps even as an ontological principle) as "one's own starting point, one's point of departure for political (and ethical!) action" rather than it being a goal we set out for from somewhere else by other means. Postanarchism, says Newman, starts with anarchy (i.e. "the wild") rather than setting out from elsewhere and going in search of it, hoping against hope to find it like some mythical El Dorado.

He thus denominates postanarchism itself as "a form of autonomous thinking and acting" which I would very much like to identify with "the wild" and says we can have that here and now in our thinking, our being and our acting and that it is not somewhere foreign that we need to find (if we can find it at all). To this extent, postanarchism is then exactly "ontological" for it is entirely a matter of (our) being and becoming. The wild is not somewhere out there, a place, an environment; its somewhere to be actualised within every one of us, something we become, something we are, something we can share and even spread and participate in, something that other living things share and spread and participate in regardless of what we do. It is exactly the ungovernability, the self-determining self-actualisation, I referred to earlier. In a second chapter of *Postanarchism* on the subject of "singularities" Newman thus denominates human beings as "self-creating subjects without fixed identity or calling" where these are "form(s) of autonomous life". The most important thing to understand about "singularities" is that they are not the subjectivities or individualities of the liberal Enlightenment. "Singularity",

as Newman insists, “is life in excess of such categories”, categories which Michel Foucault described well in his description of biopolitics and the growing classificatory influence of science and politics together upon the modern human being which was about “constraining it within representable, statist categories of the individual and the population, with their predetermined capacities and interests”. Newman’s postanarchist idea of the human singularity is NOT that: it is definitively NOT the subjected subject that is based on either “overlapping forms of surveillance and regulation” or “centralized, hierarchical institutions” (or both) as:

“*we are inserted into an apparatus which seeks to capture every facet of existence and desire within its circuits – of consumption, communication, spectacle, hyper-visibility, idiotic enjoyment, endless and meaningless work, debt and constant insecurity – creating an unlimited dependency.*”

Dependency and conformity are essential to such a form of proceeding and Newman’s submission is that “the liberal subject” is absolutely founded on such a notion to the extent that it is regarded as natural, normal and beyond question. Who doubts that the current way of life (whatever it is) is actually fundamentally correct? Very few people who are usually easily cast as crackpots or weirdos and so made easy to pigeon-hole and disregard. So, as Newman makes clear, “The Master we obey is an invisible one, and in many ways only a creation of our own obedience, yet we nonetheless obey it as though it were absolute.” We have been schooled without realising we were being schooled and we have totally swallowed the lesson. How? Newman provides an explanation:

“*We can identify a number of subjective states produced by this strange machine, affective intensities that overlap with one another in the contemporary (in)dividual. For instance, we*

are subjected to ubiquitous apparatuses and measures of security, from the most mundane and everyday (surveillance cameras, data-gathering through internet searches, and so on) to the most terroristic – draconian anti-terrorist and border control measures and exceptional police powers. We live in regimes of hyper-visibility in which everything must be on display and where we must continually offer ourselves up for inspection. One only has to observe passengers passing through airport security, who make such a show of their compliance, who want to appear only too happy to have their bodies scanned and luggage searched. Yet, if our lives must be continually secured, why do we feel so insecure? Why do enhanced security measures only make us feel more anxious? Because we start to fear security more than the thing we are being secured against; we dread the day when we might come to the attention of the authorities, when we come to appear, even mistakenly, as a subject of risk, a suspicious individual.

Of course, what contributes to our anxiety – and we should note the fact that anxiety, along with other mental disorders, is becoming more prevalent today – is the situation of economic precariousness that most of us find ourselves in; haunted by the spectre of unemployment, debt and poverty, we cling on to what we have, terrified of losing our jobs, of sinking into financial oblivion. Therefore we work longer and harder than ever, and, with modern communications technology, we are always at work, always contactable, always willing to do whatever is asked of us. So the precarious subject is also a docile and obedient subject; the spectre of economic destitution, of descending into 'bare life', as well as the threat of an increasingly punitive state, works to keep us in line...

Obedience and docility are also induced today through everyday habits of consumption and communication. The contemporary subject is a constantly distracted subject. Much has been written about the jarring, disorienting effects of the superfluous information and images we

are overloaded with today, and the cognitive dissonance and subjective unhappiness produced by our total immersion into the circuits of communicative capitalism. We suffer from a kind of technology-induced attention deficit disorder. Not only are we over-stimulated by constant semiotic activation through intrusive and all-pervasive communicative technologies, beyond the limits of what our organism can bear, but we are also lured, through participation in social media and blogging, into circuits of capitalistic jouissance accompanied by networks of surveillance..."

If you are in a position to be reading this then you have no doubt got the picture and the gist of what Saul Newman has to say here. The subjected, individualised human is a processed, systematised, put-in-their-place human, one whose wild desires have been captured and co-opted by the game show of life and the "bread and circuses". If you are going to work for a boss in a job that you don't necessarily care for all that much and you work extensive hours because "I've got to live" then, yes, I am talking about you. But this is not news. Wolfi Landstreicher and Hakim Bey, as just two examples, were saying this 30 years ago. And they were also pointing out, as Saul Newman does here too, that this fact is, as Newman puts it, "the biggest hurdle to any sort of radical transformation". You cannot become a freeman, to use a historical analogy, while you still think like a slave, are wedded to your slavery, exist in such a way as your slavery constitutes who you are. There are more important chains to break than the ones about your wrists, ankles and neck (albeit they are also important chains to break too). Newman associates this with cultural infantilism ("dumbing down") and the contemporary return of all kinds of pernicious fundamentalisms as if, in a complex world of constantly transforming difference, any dumb simplicity that only requires an all too easy and never criticised belief ("my country is the best", "men are the masters of women", "whites are the masters of blacks") will do. These are "dangerous, destructive, and self-destructive pathologies".

But if the liberal political era has been formed upon the basis of the human being imagined as the liberal individualised subject, something to be classified and subjected from above, then how does Newman the postanarchist imagine us out of this liberal hole? First of all, not through identities or identity politics for, as he makes clear:

"*nothing could be less challenging to the neoliberal order than the desire for recognition on the part of particular identities, whether cultural, sexual or otherwise. Such claims for political and cultural recognition, while important in the past, are now simply inscribed within the neoliberal state order, incorporated through its logic of representation in which differences and particularities, so long as they are identifiable and representable, are simply accommodated by existing institutions:...*

Identity politics risks falling into an essentialist trap where one is in a sense imprisoned within one's own subjectivity, whose interests and desires have been carved out for it by power; it is well to recall Foucault's insight that the task of politics today was to not discover who we are 'but to refuse who we are'...

There is a kind of narcissism at work in certain forms of identity politics, in which the insistence on one's discrimination at the hands of sexist or heteronormative institutions comes to be the thing that defines one's identity. At best, identity politics becomes a benign form of liberalism, obsessed with the representation of ever more particular and marginal identities – as in L-G-B-T-Q. At worst, in the insistence of an authentic identity that is constantly victimized, identity politics becomes akin to a form of fundamentalism. Either way, this kind of politics of representation and recognition has reached a point of exhaustion."

The point here is that adding a letter for you or "people like you" to an acronym is not challenging anything and its only making anyone visible in the context of a political regime, system of thought and way of seeing human relations it has done nothing to challenge or unsettle – let alone to refuse. If the point here is AUTONOMY – and it is – then the task is creating autonomous forms of subjectivities and relations and spaces or, as Newman puts it, "to generate forms of autonomous political interaction and intensity". In other words, you must challenge and refuse THE MODE OF THOUGHT rather than simply its categories. You must refuse to manifest yourself in the terms of power by which power aims to control you. More radically, Newman suggests that "maybe the most radical gesture is to disappear, to become anonymous". And some activists have literally become "Anonymous". Other, French, people became "The Invisible Committee". In a world where you are increasingly required to be tagged and labelled as a thing at all times all the better to control you (hello digital IDs!), REFUSING to be that thing, or anything in a system of things, is an act of revolt, resistance and rebellion. It will put you at odds with the anti-wild civilising of the world but it will also be an act of authentic wildness. As The Invisible Committee then said in their manifesto *The Coming Insurrection*:

"To be socially nothing is not a humiliating condition, the source of some tragic lack of recognition – from whom do we seek recognition? – but is on the contrary the condition for maximum freedom of action."

In the wild there are no names, no labels and no descriptions. (There is also no such thing as "total surveillance".) There are only relationships made in, by and through direct contact and direct action – beyond "identity", a completely different imaginary of political and ethical relationship. And this is where I get to where Newman explains human beings (and, I would argue, perhaps more than that) as singularities.

Newman begins by riffing on the work of Giorgio Agamben with reference to “whatever singularity”, a post-identitarian, “post-sovereign” figure “which cannot be assimilated within the representative structures of the state”. Just by their appearance and reality these people seem to destabilise a political status quo based on identity and classification (i.e. control). What you cannot name or classify is implicitly threatening, so this logic goes, and is probably why, in today’s world, it is increasingly impossible to do ANYTHING without first identifying yourself (as I write this the UK government has announced plans for a COMPULSORY digital ID necessary for things like work or buying or renting property – at least that is its initial PR justification). As Newman then explains Agamben’s idea:

“‘*Whatever singularities’ form a ‘coming community’ which is identified not through any particular category but simply by the condition of belonging – a sort of open, amorphous community without identity and borders.*”

Such an idea immediately has “wild” possibilities when one reminds oneself that in the wild nothing but us is using human categories or ways of proceeding in order to do anything. Such human ways are wholly human-cultural and we can only imagine that every other organism has its own, non-human, ways instead. The postanarchist point here is that:

“*postanarchism does not anchor itself in the idea of a coherent social body, based on pre-existing forms of community life and relations of sociality, but, rather, presupposes an undoing or rupturing of this body.*”

This radical openness makes sense because things not identifying themselves by hard and fast identities arbitrated from above cannot organise themselves based on such identities

based, as they have commonly come to be, on things like “biological essence, vocation, project or destiny”. Instead, Newman posits the idea that such people may be “reclaiming the possibilities of an autonomous and contingent political life for its own sake.” For institutions which exist based only on classification, or primarily in order to classify, this can only be perceived as a threat.

What strikes me as interesting about all this, however, is how reminiscent of the wild – the actual wild – it sounds. Here the classifications and incarcerations of civilisation are alien and unknown. However things are interacting and co-existing, they are not doing it in human ways and based on human understandings such as names, identities or conceptual classifications. Life here is surely making decisions, acting on impulse, responding to desires, needs, sights, sounds, smells, etc., but it is doing it in much more organic and immediate ways and without the ability to incarcerate everything in a technological reality that becomes increasingly inescapable. Whilst there are always conflicts and unequal relations in the wild, it never approaches a totalising power or a situation notable for the centralising power one species, or one example of a species, wields over all the others. Life always finds a way to escape, break out, run free, move on, transform, adapt. But then again, even if it didn’t it wouldn’t care for “the wild” is but an abstract generalisation made up of billions of lives of minute particularity. These autonomous lives partake in the struggle to survive and this is where the idea of “the wild” comes from, rising up from below.

But back to singularity. Newman writes:

“*Agamben’s understanding of singularity suggests the possibility of a new form of association with others, which is defined not by a specific identity but simply by belonging.*

Indeed, one of the central tasks of political theory, it seems to me, is to rethink the very idea of community in ways which, on the one hand, no longer construct absolute borders and exclude and, on the other, no longer assimilate and crush those who are included...

(Jean-Luc) Nancy (then) argues that it is no longer possible to restore the idea of an organic, immanent community, defined by an essence; this can lead only to totalitarianism. Instead, he proposes the idea of a community of non-essence, non-immanence, defined not by any particular identity but by its own openness and finitude. Nor should community be defined by a specific telos, work of production or project to be achieved... (in other words) ontological freedom as the starting point for any understanding of politics and community."

We may muse here that everything is born free but is then immediately entangled in constraining relations. (Foucault would perhaps have denominated them power relations.) But this is not quite right for the conditions of anything's coming to be were also from and of this rhizome of relations too. The point Nancy makes, which Newman harnesses for postanarchism and his understanding of "singularity" within that, is that:

"*this atomism of the individual subject is impossible because the very notion implies relations with others insofar as one differentiates oneself from others, and therefore there is an inevitable opening out onto the world. Community, then, should be thought of simply in terms of a relation of openness which undoes autarchic, sovereign identities and makes impossible closure and totality of any kind...*

For Nancy, singularity is a kind of finitude, a relational space of sharing with others – what he calls elsewhere 'being singular plural' – which foregrounds Being, whose essence is therefore finite; indeed singularity, insofar as it disrupts the consistency and sovereignty of

any identity by in a sense de-grounding it, is linked to the idea of ontological anarchy developed earlier. Community can be seen as the coexistence or co-appearance (what Nancy calls compearance) of these singularities, whose being-in-common is not grounded on any prior social being or identity but is always contingently defined by those singularities themselves: 'there is no communion of singularities in a totality superior to them and immanent to their common being'. So his notion of an 'inoperative community' of singularities is by necessity an open community, without essence, identity, borders or predetermined project, an ontologically anarchic community which is always 'unworking' itself and opening itself to that which is beyond it."

Newman's important gloss on this description is that "Nancy understands singularity as a form of uniqueness or plurality which is irreducible to abstractions and determined identities". This, of course, brings him intellectually close to one of Saul Newman's (and my own) favourite influences in Max Stirner, he of the "egoism" of "uniqueness" and self-responsibility whose quote heads this chapter as well as this book. For Stirner in *The Unique and Its Property* it was both degrading and illegitimately confining to imagine human beings being classified or being "individualised" for such purposes as "identities". Stirner's concept of "the Unique" (which is not the psychological "ego" at all and uses a German word, *der Einzige*, other than ego in denominating it) is, in fact, anything but a form of liberal individualism. It is Newman's assertion that *der Einzige*, the Unique, cannot be described as an identity at all and so is not any kind of public or social classification, being better understood exactly as a singularity (i.e. a black hole in cosmological terms), an idea that is "useful for understanding contemporary postanarchist subjectivity."

The key point here is that for Stirner, as subsequently for Newman, a man and state-made "religion of humanity" institutes "a new kind of alienation" from the unique, self-

organising, self-actualising beings that we all are. It institutes general standards of being that we must live up to. It imposes requisite subjectivities, rationalities, moralities, every single one of which denies the uniquenesses in all of us. We are not simply all copies of the same thing or examples of some Platonic archetype or "form". We are not concrete versions of abstractions. Stirner and Newman suggest that we must refuse both essentialism AND humanism. The demands of my liberty as I myself, as a unique one, then seem to posit that I consequently refuse all that subjects or subjectifies or subjugates me from the outside – and this includes the "liberal government of individualisation", that which is definitively unwild. We are not examples of a human being. We are unique and more akin to nothing – in fact "creative nothing" as Stirner calls us ("in a constant state of flux and becoming, consuming itself and creating itself anew.") This creative nothing, this singularity, is both indefinable and ungovernable. It refutes and refuses the very notion of government in an act of indigenous wildness.

Community entanglement, even cooperative action, can only thereafter then be imagined in terms of the associative unions or "unions of egoists" of which Stirner spoke, a way "to think individual difference and collectivity together" as Newman puts this. A primary concern for the uniquenesses in this collectivity, these creative nothings, is their "ownness", a Stirnerite term and an intellectual cognate of autonomy. Collective activity is definitively thought of in this formulation as always coming from below from these singular, self-actualising autonomies in what can then only be imagined as a form of voluntarism. Newman says that:

"*Stirner wants to clear the political field of all fixed and universalizing identities and affirm politics as a site of continual invention and creativity from which multiple forms of*

subjectivity, action and association can emerge. It suggests a rhizomatic, post-sovereign and post-identity form of political association which defies any logic of representation."

We must see in the following chapters of Postanarchism where this takes us.

Most immediately the answer here is that it takes us to insurrection (and not to a traditional form of social revolution). This is because if we are to reimagine who we are in more autonomous ways then this changes both how we are to relate and what we want accordingly. Or:

"*If the refusal of fixed and governable identities is central to postanarchism, then political action cannot be conceived in terms of a communication or inclusion of demands within existing representative structures; if 'non-power' is postanarchism's starting point, political action cannot be concerned with the revolutionary seizure of power or the construction of democratic hegemonies.*"

The point here is precisely that autonomy is the point and it is this that changes the focus. Such a focus on autonomy means that we can no longer be satisfied with regime change (the usual connotation of social revolution) as if regime change accomplished autonomy by itself. (In fact many such social revolutions in the past achieved nothing of the sort and it is doubtful if such revolutions can ever achieve it.) Rather, autonomy is held at the level of the singularities by which anything else, by combination and cooperation, is made. This fact mandates the autonomy of insurrection in, by and through one's own direct action as opposed to a social revolution which merely gives you new bosses. Insurrection, then, is the autonomous choice, the one based on, and which preserves, the autonomy we seek. This also, in my mind at least, preserves the context of the wild based on billions of

examples of self-organising, self-determinative, self-actualising life. Anything which seeks to corral, limit or control that at some meta level or in some overarching way is a threat to the progress of such wild autonomy and that in which it results or finds expression. Autonomy, notably, is not mass coercion and this is yet another reason why revolution is out and insurrection is in. For the latter is "for ourselves"; the former must coerce others.

"Insurrection" here holds a particular understanding or inflection. It is not to be imagined as simply "a spontaneous uprising against power". "Insurrection" is not about establishing "a new power over", that is, sovereignty. It is not about establishing a new state – as many and various revolutions so often are. Insurrection is the dissolution of "normal politics" that could even lead to states, politics or governments. It is the reimagination of people as subjects and in the relations they can then conceive and build together. As Newman puts this, the mentality we have here is one which is based on "the notion of insurrection as an autonomous form of political mobilization and practice which sets itself apart from the state – which does not seek state power for itself but actually embodies its dissolution." This, in turn, motivates all kinds of ethical questions: Who are we acting for? Why are we acting? How are we acting? Etc. It is here vital that no one engages in insurrection on behalf of others. In fact, strictly speaking, you can only ever engage in it for yourself (even if with others). In anarchist context, Newman puts it like this:

"*The insurrection relies on informal groups of anarchists, organized on the basis of affinity, who intervene in specific situations without these actions being overdetermined by the idea of the immanent revolution – in other words, without the expectation that such actions will lead to the social revolution.*"

In Newman's mind, I think rightly, the focus on insurrection is a consequence of singularities not being identities or the liberal political individualised self. Singularities, as has been said, are not things to be represented and they resist representational logic or the use of it. Newman goes so far as to say that they mandate "an insurrection against fixed identities". (And so presumably against any institution which would base itself upon them and their use.) The subject as singularity thus instigates a revolt against all the forces of representationalism and this leads, as I have said many times before, and as Newman observes correctly here too, directly into one of the key passages of Stirner's *The Unique and Its Property* which is where Newman is getting a lot of these ideas from. Distinguishing insurrection from revolution for his own, egoistic, purposes, Stirner writes:

"*Revolution and insurrection must not be looked upon as synonymous. The former consists in an overturning of conditions, of the established condition or status, the state or society, and is accordingly a political or social act; the latter has indeed for its unavoidable consequence a transformation of circumstances, yet does not start from it but from men's discontent with themselves, is not an armed rising but a rising of individuals, a getting up without regard to the arrangements that spring from it. The Revolution aimed at new arrangements;* ***insurrection leads us no longer to let ourselves be arranged, but to arrange ourselves****, and sets no glittering hopes on 'institutions'. It is not a fight against the established, since, if it prospers, the established collapses of itself;* ***it is only a working forth of me out of the established****.*" (bold mine)

In my terms this is a grasping back of our wild nature and a refusal of any longer being externally and arbitrarily ordered or arranged. The insurrection is the wild – and that because it is fundamentally from and for ourselves, a self-organising. As Newman then remarks: "The insurrection is an affirmation of the autonomy and singularity of the

individual." This, as Stirner goes on to say in his own work at length, is not about any "cause". It is personal. It is for ourselves. Consequently:

"*freedom is not the end goal of the insurrection but, rather, its starting point. In other words, the insurrection starts not with the desire to change external conditions which might be said to oppress the individual but, rather, with the affirmation of the self over these conditions...*"

Such action is both the assertion of one's own autonomy but also the refusal of external power. It is a matter, in Stirner's terms as the Stirner interpreter Saul Newman understands, of our "ownness":

"*So, rather than a revolutionary project which sets itself the goal of liberating people from power – and which risks merely imposing upon them another kind of power in its place – the insurrection allows people to constitute their own freedom or, as Stirner puts it, their 'ownness', by first reclaiming their own self – that is to say, reclaiming their autonomy. We might say, then, that the insurrection is the political articulation of ontological anarchy: a form of praxis which is not overdetermined by a project or telos, but which simply assumes and puts into practice the freedom that we already have.*"

An interesting consequence of this is how we think about power:

"*we need to understand power not as a substance or a thing, but as a relationship which we forge and renew everyday through our actions and our relations with others. As the anarchist Gustav Landauer put it, 'The state is a social relationship; a certain way of people relating to one another. It can be destroyed by creating new social relationships; i.e., by*

people relating to one another differently.' Again, the emphasis here is not so much on the revolutionary seizure or destruction of the external system of power as on a micro-political transformation of the self and its relation to others and the creation of alternative and more autonomous relations – the result of which is the disintegration of state power. We can perhaps speak of an internalized insurrection, an insurrection that goes to the roots of our subjectivity, even our psyche, before it is turned outwards."

This trespasses into an area of postanarchist theory that is very interesting and concerns power, how it comes to be and what it involves and requires. Newman intriguingly argues that, actually, it is not simply external forces or forms of relations at all. In fact, as intimated above, it might even be argued that power "is basically an illusion" or, rather, that ITS HOLD OVER US is basically an illusion (one that is very convenient and helpful to power itself and so being something it finds necessary to engender and maintain). What is being said here is that our relation to power, how we envision, imagine and orientate ourselves towards it, can either reinforce or undermine power. Its hold over us is at least in part an imaginary one – i.e. something that we need to be in the position of imagining for it to be so. So here insurrection is not so much about "counter-power" for counter-power almost always simply becomes just power in the end. Insurrection is a matter of INDIFFERENCE TO POWER all the better to avoid it and recognising that our imagination of it in some sense creates both it and its hold over us. Insurrection can then itself be imagined as "the relational space of freedom that is opened up when we reclaim and affirm ourselves, outside of any institutionalised form or pre-determined *telos*."

But here "freedom" is also a problem and Max Stirner, one of the major influences behind Newman's work on postanarchism, is all over this, himself preferring the term "ownness" to "freedom" since the latter is easily regarded as both an abstract quality and also a

cause. Neither of these things, for Stirner, are redolent of, or speak to, autonomy. If one has a cause then one has no autonomy: one must fight for the cause. One is bound by it as a dogma. This is so even if that cause is "freedom". One may become a "freedom maniac" – as Stirner suggests in *The Unique and Its Property* – but this is not having autonomy or, as he calls it in his book, "ownness". For Stirner, and then for Newman, "ownness" in fact creates a new type of freedom for it is "the freedom to be free of freedom as a cause" as well. In other words, real freedom is actually autonomy, ownness, something you create from and for yourself. As Newman then glosses Stirner further:

"*Ownness is a way of restoring to the individual his or her capacity for freedom, of reminding the individual that he is already free in an ontological sense, rather than seeing freedom as a universal goal to be attained for humanity.*"

This can also be thought of as "selfishness" – but one must be careful not to be contaminated by post-Christian ethics when one does so where "self-sacrifice" and "altruism" have been promoted as the prime ethics instead. On the thinking here autonomy, ownness, and similar "egoistic desires" are given as the explanation for the human animal (and perhaps even for life more widely, certainly an avenue I am open to exploring in the wild). In such an argument, one I have made before, social togetherness and cooperative action are far from being dismissed as either bad or unnecessary (quite the opposite in fact) but they are motivated and explained in a different way. So Newman says here:

"*cooperation and what Kropotkin would call 'mutual aid' are engaged in not out of some sense of self-sacrifice and obligation but, on the contrary, out of one's own 'selfish' sense of joy and pleasure, which is intensified through one's relations with others.*"

This is at the very least to argue, counter-morally for those with the morals of selflessness, that selfishness, autonomy, ownness, are not malign ethics but ethics which may themselves motivate genuine social action as much, and as well, as any others. Even the prophet of ownness himself, Max Stirner, conceived of the "union of egoists" as a positive thing, after all. So the postanarchist insurrection is not then a cause. It is an ethical anti-politics of ownness, autonomy and selfishness that can enable and motivate cooperative action in the social sphere. The autonomy and singularity which motivates this is then that aspect of organising ourselves that refuses the arrangements of others and so refuses our being arranged as we each take responsibility for ourselves. I find this to be a much more wild-friendly description of the human being and its action in the world than I do liberal-political or religious-selfless descriptions. It is, at the very least, acknowledging of the fact that life, even where it is exceedingly cooperative or social, is created singly and that each single organism requires self-maintaining and self-actualising properties and characteristics in order to exist. What this explanation then tells us is that this has a logic all of its own, a wild logic that is free of civilisation's political need to control and obligate us. On the contrary, in the wild things should only obligate themselves and are always fighting for their own lives however that is functionally achieved.

This borders on Newman's few words on insurrection in the context of "prefiguration". This is basically the anarchist concept that "the means are the end" or that the only way to get to where you want to be is to start acting, behaving and relating to others now as you would wish all others one day will too. In other words, you can only become the thing by acting like the thing in the here and now. You essentially just start doing it in, by and through your own direct action. In terms of a postanarchist concept of insurrection in the context of it as a prefiguration of an imagined postanarchist political reality, Newman

imagines this involves acting without any pre-determined future end or goal (as before, this would not be autonomy but a cause liable to become a dogmatic bind upon someone. The focus must always be the authentic embodying of "ownness") but also simultaneously imagines constantly working to elaborate and create "subjectivities and relationships which are self-governing and no longer enthralled to power" (the language sounds Foucauldian because it is). All of this will, of course, always be contingent for the autonomous are not looking to create certain fixed states of social relations but rather simply to maintain autonomy through their lives regardless, or irrespective, of how they then relate. So here we can see that this differentiates it from even many classical assertions of anarchism which themselves did envisage an "end state" as it were, a metanarrative of freedom. For the postanarchist, however, Newman says this cannot be. That we are, and remain, autonomous singularities in constant insurrection is enough. I call that thinking in the wild. And acting like the wild.

There is one further thing to be accounted for from Saul Newman's argument in *Postanarchism* before we get to rounding up what this all means. This is "voluntary inservitude". It is related, in turn, to the concepts of singularity and the postanarchist conception of insurrection as a consistent "indifference to power" as an expression of them. This is not least because, as Saul Newman argues, "Perhaps the greatest obstacle to radical politics today – as indeed at any time – is not the formidable nature of Power but, rather, our obedience to it." Put more pointedly, we may ask the question: "why do people obey, even when it is not in their interests to do so?" What this in turn highlights is that there is no reason necessarily why obedience should be given to anyone, regardless of their power or status, and so that, in some sense, obedience is always a choice (in the sense that disobedience is always a simultaneous option) that is coming from us. In political reality, however, it is often the case that voluntary servitude, obedience and

passivity are manifest. People in general, in other words, often have a knack of being submissive – and that obviously has its own political consequences as would its opposite, the refusal to obey. Our attitudes and behaviour, in this sense, are then co-constitutive of our environment, an environment they help to create and maintain. All that Newman then has to say about voluntary inservitude is in recognition of these observations which are clearly relevant to a rhetoric concerned with freedom configured as autonomy.

Newman first considers the fact that people often do seem willing to obey, and often without question, in a lot of cases – and that this is then a problem. He briefly makes mention of Wilhelm Reich's assertion that human beings have, or can have, an "authoritarian freedom-fearing structure" which results in things like conservatism of habits and actions and even wanting to be ruled or controlled (which terminates in the reality of dictators that have, in some sense, been willed into being). Whilst taking this idea seriously in some respects, I find it all a little too simplistic for me as a general explanation and so I am wary of the "one size fits all" nature of this answer. What is interesting in it is precisely the aforementioned implication that our behaviour and attitudes, which we know are culturally negotiated and invented, can result in material outcomes and consequences of a social or political kind. We want a boss, we find a boss. We want there to be rules, we orientate ourselves to regimes of order and control or fall in with those that happen to exist. Etc. Newman suggests that things from sexual repression to patriarchy to authoritarian states may have something to do with this and so the idea as a whole puts both human psychology and sociology in the dock in terms of how they work and what they can lead to. It begs the question of if people are in some sense getting what they want in and from the societies they live in and the lives that they lead. After all, the relationship between a vassal and a leader or an autonomous pirate and his crew are very different but it is also true that they may both contain the seeds of

the realities, and the experiences concomitant with them, that they create in and through them.

Newman turns to Étienne de La Boétie for an explanation and his *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* from 1548 (which, if it was written then, means the author was only 18). De La Boétie essentially asks the question "Why do people obey?" in this book and he writes from the perspective of a certain naturalism in which it seems obvious that even beasts of agrarian burden really want to be free – for freedom is a natural condition and endowment. "Power", on the other hand, is somewhat artificial and often coercive (perhaps necessarily so, in fact, in order to manifest as power). "Servitude" seems consequently far from natural and many animals would rather lose their lives in trying to retain a primitive and natural freedom rather than allowing themselves to be captured and put into servitude. De La Boétie contrasts this with human beings, however, who often seem more willing to simply accept their servitude and to allow their habituation to being dominated by others or invented circumstances for the purpose of their control. This makes de La Boétie, as Newman notes, in some sense an anti-Hobbes – in that Thomas Hobbes thought "natural freedom" or a "state of nature" a horror to be escaped (which is why he thought we needed sovereign states and leaders to take us away from it). De La Boétie, however, reverses the polarity on this and wonders why people, being given a state of nature, would rush to leave it and become controlled. The anthropologist, Pierre Clastres, who wrote an essay on de La Boétie, remarked on this anthropologically in what can be seen as a "fall" of "primitive" human beings from the "grace" of nature before the onrushing god of "The State", in whose creation they have stupidly acquiesced. As a result, myriad native ways of life and their cultures have been utterly destroyed and human beings in general have become increasingly accustomed to servitude and forgotten that they were ever completely free.

One observation de La Boétie makes here is that human beings (as other forms of life) can be habituated to conditions and surroundings, subject to the flexibility of living of which they are capable. In human beings the habituated circumstances often become naturalised so that, today, there are certainly people who think, for example, that capitalism is natural and normal (and, thus, nothing to kick up a fuss about). Similar people probably imagine that being led by someone or some institution with the power of incarceration, or even the power of life and death, is natural and normal too. De La Boétie also makes the point that power deploys distractions and seductions in order to entangle us in its spectacles besides constructing "a hierarchy of relations in which the tyrant's place is sustained by intricate networks and relations of dependency." The aim here is to habituate us to a place in the body politic, one that it seems too costly or dangerous to rebel against and without which we risk everything (then judged as a risk too great to actually take). And so our acquiescence is gradually coerced and our autonomy is retarded, perhaps even almost to nothing.

Newman takes all this and gives it an insurrectionary reading consequent on de La Boétie's own conclusion which is, basically, that if the servitude is coming from us and helps to create and cement the servitude itself then, if instead of obedience we disobeyed or refused to obey, that, all by itself, would create different consequences and so a different social context, one not based on our control. In other words:

"*If we have freely chosen servitude, if we willingly participate in our own domination without the need for coercion, then this means that all power, even if it appears to bear down upon us, is essentially an illusion, one of our own making. If, in other words, we have created the tyrant in our act of submission to him, this means that the tyrant has no real*

power. The power he has over us is only our power in an alienated form; the chains that bind us are the chains we ourselves have forged."

Newman then adds:

"*All power is only our power; domination is only possible through our continuing submission, the continual offering of ourselves to power. And this realization makes power fragile and unstable. All we must do is to peer through the veils of power to see its essential weakness, its emptiness and impotence. All we must do if we want to free ourselves from the power of the tyrant, according to La Boétie, is simply to take back our power – or, even more simply, to stop giving ourselves up to him, to stop rendering our power to him, to stop this continual repetition of behaviours of submission.*"

In yet other words this means that the practice of autonomy, as of our wild nature, is our respite from power and how this notion of a postanarchist indifference to power works itself out. If power is cemented, even if only in part, by our imagining it so, and then living consciously within this imaginary, then the power to unimagine it is entirely at our autonomous disposal too and with equal consequence. The suggestion is then, essentially, that in imagining ourselves free and then acting according to that imaginary we are, in some measure and in reality, more free than we were before and, perhaps more pertinently, more apt to act and behave according to a logic of wild, autonomous freedom than according to a logic of servitude that has been embedded within us and with which we have acquiesced. We must, then, not give the power to others but keep it for ourselves. We must "stop this continual repetition of behaviours of submission" and start behaving autonomously until that is our habit instead. None of this is anything to do with overthrowing tyrants or destroying states or creating new world orders. It is a matter

of indifference to such things. Rather, it is a case of concerning ourselves with our own autonomy and letting the rest take care of itself. I call that an ethics of the wild and to have the responsibility to answer for yourself the questions: “Do you want to be free? Do you will yourself free?” This is to think of power not as a transcendent reality pressing down upon us but as a contingent event, something that can be reversed, something that can be otherwise. It says, as Newman does, that “freedom – the ability to think, live and act otherwise – is the ontological basis of all power.” Or as De La Boétie says himself:

“*From all these indignities, such as the very beasts of the field would not endure, you can deliver yourselves if you try, not by taking action, but merely by willing to be free. Resolve to serve no more, and you are at once freed. I do not ask that you place hands upon the tyrant to topple him over, but simply that you support him no longer; then you will behold him, like a great Colossus whose pedestal has been pulled away, fall of his own weight and break in pieces.*”

So coming back to what has been said before, then, we see how autonomy, insurrection and ownness now fit in with a desire for an involuntary inservitude, a will to break free of control and to disobey rather than to become habituated to an incarcerating obedience. Newman calls this “an ethics (and I would say an anti-politics) of non-domination.” In many ways this is always what I have taken anarchism to be. It is a matter of cultivating in ourselves “habits of liberty” rather than “habits of slavery” in the recognition that how we are going to approach life and existence AFFECTS THE OUTCOME. Here it is key to remember that none of this can involve goals (as Stirner would have reminded us) because a pre-determined end just becomes a new form of domination. Autonomy is the point, simply put, and its maintenance is the guarantee of its continuance. Another name for this autonomy is our voluntary inservitude, our wild will to disobedience of self-

appointed authorities and institutions and so to self-organisation. As Newman then concludes this section of his book:

"*Freedom – or ownness – as a release from our voluntary servitude is a discipline, an art – something that is learnt, that one learns from others and teaches oneself, something that is fashioned, worked on, patiently elaborated, practised at the level of the self in its relations with others. It is a work on our limits, both external and, perhaps more importantly, internal. The important point, however, is that freedom is our ever-present possibility and, indeed, our ontological condition, our point of departure. The realization and affirmation of this ontological freedom, coupled with its ethical responsibilities, might be seen as the central motif of postanarchist political theory.*"

It is in finally coming to appraise what all this postanarchist autonomy amounts to that I see it clearly as cognate with what I am calling my own "wild" take on the ethics and anti-politics of anarchy. Both are essentially about "ontological anarchy", an anarchy not of dogma or doctrine but of being and becoming. This, in fact, is one of the major reasons why it strikes me that postanarchism has something to do with "the wild" – for that is a matter of being and becoming too. For Newman postanarchism differs from anarchism in one major respect: for the latter the anarchy sought, which is here a political construction of human relations, results from deliberative human action to achieve it in some better future after that work is done; but for the former this anarchy, now imagined as an ontological condition, already exists and is the basis of any subsequent behaviour without end or goal. So, for postanarchism:

"*It means that political action is no longer determined by an absolute rational and moral end – by notions of the universal emancipation of mankind or the construction of the ideal*

society. However, insofar as anarchy, or the indeterminacy of the social order, is our ontological point of departure, it means that power and authority, because they are grounded upon their own nothingness, are always open to contestation. Therefore the horizon of political action remains open and contingent."

Newman argues here that "the secret of power is its own non-existence, its own absence of foundations". I take this point onboard as well as its furtherance in the view that ontological anarchy is based on the idea of a "freedom that we always already have". But I disagree with Newman about nihilism not also being a "real implication" of this imaginary too. Newman himself would make the ontological freedom the point. I would argue that this is only another name for an active nihilism he seemingly shies away from. Newman talks here about power's "absence of foundations" or "power and authority" being "grounded upon their own nothingness" but I would suggest that it is not only power or authority that lacks these foundations – everything does, the freedom that he talks about no less than anything else. Nothing has any foundations and isn't that partly what Max Stirner is saying too when he even makes the claim that The Unique of his book bases their affair "on nothing"? Postanarchism, in my mind, just as the wild which is a void, is precisely about an active nihilism of possibilities rather than foundations. It is an arena where things can, may and no doubt will happen but it offers no foundations in a philosophical sense for any of it for nothing has to be or become and everything could be otherwise. There are no ends or goals here, no "way things are", but only the ways they could or might be in a kaleidoscope of transformation. On the one hand, this might be equated with Nietzsche's imaginal reality where all is interpretation; on another it is Gilles Deleuze's proliferation of differences; on a third, it is Jacques Derrida's conceptual world that deconstructs itself continually. Yet, at the end of the day, the result is the same anti-foundational and contingent world which seems to me to be a form of active nihilism.

This, I would argue, is actually one good reason why the point of postanarchism would appear to be the recognition and maintenance of an autonomy that is always already available to us.

This autonomy is there, available, but that does not mean it has to be taken up and acted upon both consciously and with some imagination. The history of humanity is, in fact, in one sense the history of how this very autonomy has been given, or stolen, away – not least undercover of the illusion that it does not really exist. This autonomy, thought of politically in postanarchist theory, comes close to the "self-organisation" I imagine in terms of the endowments emergent in life itself when thinking biologically. But just as we have a biological life we can choose to do nothing with until it simply fades away and goes again, so, too, do we have this ontological freedom that can equally be activated and energised or neglected and left to go unrecognised. It is here that Newman pops up to say that the understanding articulated in his version of postanarchism is "a certain ethos or way of living and seeing the world which is impelled by the realization of the freedom that one already has." This is really the freedom and opportunity inherent in living and existing at all which is, at the same time, often also a freedom that politically and economically active others wish to steal away from us. And so you get anarchism and its postanarchist interpretation as both material and imaginal realities fashioned to combat this.

It is important to see here that the battle is always both a material AND an imaginal one. In many respects the materiality we see and interact with is one formed in and by the imagination. Nothing is simply given; everything is imagined as a collection of relations which generate meanings and values. Nothing simply is. Everything becomes, is becoming (a consequence of nihilism). Power and authority in the world seeks to make so (i.e.

coercively make governable) whilst the forces of anti-power (i.e. that which is simply “the wild” in its prolific diversity) seek only their own self-government which produces a realm of ungovernability. (The wild is, and should be, a place where totalising absolute government is impossible.) This, in one sense, can then (perhaps necessarily) be imagined as a refutation of narratives (or, perhaps, in terms more suitable to Newman, indifference to narratives). Here that the focus is autonomy is important as is the Stirnerite point made earlier that none of this is done “for a cause”. A cause is just another narrative and to exist freely in this void of nothing we must not become bound up by narratives (most importantly, including our own). This is autonomy. As Newman puts this:

“*The aim of radical politics is neither the recognition of different identities nor the liberation of the People or a class, but rather the affirmation of the autonomy or ownness, to speak in Stirner’s terms, of singularities.*”

In terms of the wild this can be imagined as protecting the self-organisation of self-organisatory organisms, resisting the constant impetus to compel or control or arrange them otherwise – yet not as a cause but out of the activity of this same self-organisation (of which people may often need to be reminded), the self-organising of the self-organising that is both insurrection and voluntary inservitude. It is to argue that here we have an ethics of autonomy which is a wild ethics of life as a self-organisatory phenomenon to which autonomy is then entirely appropriately ascribed. For the postanarchist, then, as in the wild, the only requirement is precisely this autonomy. It is to say that if we have this autonomy, “broadly understood as self-government”, then we (here meaning all life) have all we need. This is a self-government beyond externally imposable duty, beyond law and beyond transcendent morality. By calling it an “ethics of autonomy” I would wish the reader to understand that as a voluntary ethics of autonomy

– as in one that is co-constitutive of the singularities that we are. It is being created and generated by and from the creative nothings that we are as something concomitant with our lives. It is important to get this straight for the liberal-authoritarian-capitalist world of our experience knows of a form of autonomy too but, as you might imagine, it is suited to its own purposes. Here:

"*The individual is thrown back upon himself and his own resources and is forced to reduce his entire existence to a marketable and commodifiable set of behaviours and performances. Those who are judged to lack the capacities for autonomy (the unemployed, the mentally ill, the delinquent) are 'forced to be free' through the infliction of various sanctions or constraints. Liberal notions of political and economic autonomy, as different and conflicting as they are at times, still impose a duty to conform to a moral and rational ideal and thereby offer only a diminished and highly ambiguous experience of autonomy.*"

This is definitively not the wild, postanarchist conception of autonomy to which I speak here. This is caged civilisation's domesticated facsimile. It is all the responsibilities of freedom but none of the actual freedom itself. Of course, with that freedom we may crash and burn: freedom is no guarantee of success and in the wild many things regularly die or suffer a cheap and uncaring fate as a consequence of that void. But then that's not exactly the point, is it? The point, as Newman makes clear in his chapter on autonomy, is that autonomy is not "a sphere of freedom delineated by institutions and laws": it is not something granted to us tied to conditions that can be removed again. It is who we are and how we become. It is a matter of "voluntarism and self-constitution", of seeing autonomy itself as "the freedom to be free" or "egoistic self-enactment". It is, as I tentatively suggested a short while ago, fighting shy of fixed ideas or narratives as things which can simply become new dominations that erode autonomy. If we imagine, for

example, that, in the wild, the billions of organisms (many so small we shall never see them with the naked eye) that are there are simply living out their lives and being what they are, then it is to apply that wild logic to us too. This is not even to have a narrative of self, as Newman makes clear in the following:

"*Singularity suggests a way of thinking about autonomy which is not grounded in an essential subjectivity as a fixed idea whose identity and characteristics are graspable by regimes of power, but rather as that which is grounded in an anarchic openness which leads to the destabilization of all identities... the self is not an essence but a series of becomings, an ongoing project of self-constitution without any clear end or telos. From this perspective autonomy should be seen not as a state one reaches, such that one is truly and finally autonomous – for what could this be but the very end of subjectivity itself? – but, rather, as a series of agonistic practices carried out in the context of constraints and limitations, both external and internal.*"

That just sounds like "being alive in an environment you don't control" to me ("the wild") and if there is any wisdom in it then that wisdom consists in realising that, beyond the operation of your own self-organisation concomitant with your self-maintenance, you should not control it – and neither should anything else. In fact, that anything else did would then be a threat to your own self-organisation. So it becomes a matter of a constant "unbinding of oneself from marketized and commodified forms of existence and the invention of alternative ways of living and seeing oneself" or "practices of disobedience and self-constitution in response to relations of power and truth". This seems to fundamentally be a matter of will because we could never resist our coercion if we did not have a will not to be coerced. This, in turn, plays into the calculus of power for, as Newman consistently reminds us, "power has no continuity or consistency of its own –

it has to be propped up and reinstituted constantly by those who submit." The autonomy we seek is then a matter of willing differently which is why so many authoritarian resources are devoted to undermining both our will and any "self-governing ways of life" we manage to fashion because of it. And this, in turn, is why there could never be "a postanarchist society" (or, in more classical terms, an "anarchist society" either). If the point is autonomy and autonomy alone then autonomy is the point (and not a certain sort of society) and so this desire resists its utopian totalisation in the imaginary of an ideal society which would just be another imposition and a new narrative dogma. All postanarchism is interested in, as an interpretation of anarchy, is "practices of autonomy" which maintain autonomy as the basis of life itself. In other words, a politics and ethics of ownness and perpetual insurrection as a way of life.

An interesting and (to me) relevant description Newman ascribes to people like this is "the new Cynics". This is partially consequent on his belief that:

"*The insurrection is a withdrawal not only from the political field – that is to say, the formal field of political institutions and systems of power – but also from the economic field. It signifies a refusal of the life of debt, consumption and financial control that has turned the existence of many around the world into one of misery, precariousness and servitude. This economic and political system is now being confronted with the naked life that it has produced...the insurrections that we see today (Newman is thinking of examples like Occupy) stage the intrusion of naked life – the life of necessity and survival – into the political realm, the realm of collective action and decision-making, thus collapsing the public/private division.*"

It is here that ancient Greek Cynics make an appearance, not least the foremost among them, Diogenes (who makes regularly appears in my writing). Newman remarks:

"*Here we are reminded of a very different conception of a political life symbolized by the curious figure of Diogenes the Cynic, who lived his life openly and publicly in the agora, sleeping naked in streets and marketplaces of ancient Athens. The scandal of his existence was to dissolve the distinction between life and politics, between the private hearth and the public square. Michel Foucault, in his final lectures at the Collège de France in 1984, reflected on Diogenes as an example of the genuine philosophical life, in which the courage of truth and the ethics of existence were embodied in every gesture and act, in one's daily life and activities. (I will come to these lectures below.) The ethical life was necessarily a scandalous life and an ascetic life, a life lived in public in the full scorn of society – the life of a dog who sleeps in the streets. The ethical life was also a militant life in the sense that it pitted itself against the norms, mores and institutions of existing society and sought to break radically with them. The highly individualistic figure of the Cynic philosopher, in his radical otherness, disrupts the boundaries of the polis and affirms his own sovereign existence in an agonistic contestation of its collective mores. The Cynic seeks, and indeed embodies in his own violently ascetic and militant style of living, an other life and an other world within the existing world. The lesson of Diogenes, then, may be that, to do politics differently, we must learn to live differently and embody politics in life and life in politics.*"

Yet to say "politics in life and life in politics" is basically to say that "the personal is the political" it seems to me. So perhaps this is a truth we have been repeating to ourselves over and over again, in different guises suitable to different situations, over centuries or even millennia. It seems cognate to saying that if we would be wild, that is, free of slaveries, arrangements and coercions, then we must simply live the autonomy we seek:

"*The only way that we can free ourselves ultimately from the economic system that enslaves us – through debt and endless, meaningless work – is if we come to no longer desire it, if we refuse the fetishism of commodities and disinvest our desires from the capitalist way of life and from the psychic economy of guilt that arises with constant indebtedness.*"

The Cynics, as I shall soon come on to, of course did this, wholly, and pretty much uniquely, embracing poverty in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. (Compare what I imagine as a Cynic-like Jesus in the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas 95: "If you have money, give it away to someone who will not give it back" and the canonical Gospel of Luke 6:20b: "Blessed are the destitute".) They survived pretty much as wild things, in other words, however they could and according to their own self-government. They ate what they found and practiced begging even, in some anecdotes, begging from statues to practice being refused. Whatever else this is, it is a life of autonomy (although whether it is desirable or not would depend on if you agreed more with Thomas Hobbes or Étienne de La Boétie in regard to "states of nature"). Most notable of all for my postanarchist, but also wild, agenda, Cynics lived "an autonomous life and non-commodified life" consciously (as a slogan) "according to nature" as an ethical practice.

That being the case, let us now move to consider the Cynics consciously and openly in this postanarchist light that has been created (from nothing). I want to work through three sources to do this, Michel Foucault's aforementioned last set of College de France lectures delivered before his death in 1984, the book *Cynics* from 2008 by the academic William Desmond and Robert Dobbin's *The Cynic Philosophers: from Diogenes to Julian*. By analysing and interrogating these sources I hope to build up a picture of the Cynic anarchy "according to nature" and bring it into dialogue with the postanarchist distinctives

discussed above. Then I shall hope to come back to the questions with which this chapter began in order to finish.

Let us begin, then, with Michel Foucault who discusses the Cynics at length in his lecture series “The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II” which was a public lecture series he delivered at the College de France (as a requirement of his employment) throughout February and March 1984 – so only a few months before his AIDS-related death in late June of that same year. In the lecture series it is important to note that the express subject is not the Cynics themselves but rather facets of them that illustrate the theme that Foucault wants to illuminate – which he thinks they are a particularly good example of. It is worth mentioning this if only because Foucault does not set out in order to go into the Cynics per se but, rather, only as they are pertinent to him. But, that said, his appraisal of the Cynics is anything but superficial and, as anyone would expect from someone notable as a “philosopher of the history of thought”, the fact that he has done his own research on the Cynics in history is certainly evident.

What attracts Foucault to the Cynics at first is conjectural but that they were noted for *parrhesia* – bold speech – is certainly not the least of the reasons in a series about “the courage of truth”. This bold speech was not something odd in the lifestyle of ancient Greek Cynics either and Foucault attempts to show how it fits perfectly into lives which are themselves and as a whole about “the courage of truth”. Of course, this is somewhat to beg the question when it has not yet been shown here how Foucault views the Cynics and there are differing views available. Even in their own time there seem to have been those who found wandering beggars who had made themselves deliberately destitute both reprehensible and ethical examples at the same time and so it is not the case that anyone is bound to think of them in the same way. Foucault, however, in his lecture series

does give a fairly comprehensive history of the Cynics within the confines of his format in order to present them historically and contextually. I do not intend to repeat, or report upon, this here though. Instead I shall simply make my own points (that are relevant to my subject here) that are cherry-picked from his lecture notes and made into my own narrative.

The first thing I have noted is that, particularly in Roman times, the Cynic was often found amongst necessarily educated and better off writers (these were the only people who could write to any great extent in that time and place when literacy was a peripheral skill for most people) as an object of criticism. Foucault says that there are "many very vigorous denunciations" of them. He even suggests the critiques of them reach a "level of violence" reserved only for the Cynic in Greco-Roman literature in regard to the many and various philosophies represented there. Specifically, "The Cynic is reproached for his coarseness, ignorance, and lack of culture." (As in previous discussions I have had in other books about pirates of the Golden Age, most Cynics appear to have overwhelmingly been men. In fact, we only positively know of one single female Cynic: the aforementioned Hipparchia. Cynicism was a philosophy of its time, place and culture and was inherently difficult to begin with, given its requirements. It was even more so for a woman.) One example of this criticism from the Roman Emperor Julian (4th century CE) in To the Cynic Heracleios is quoted by Foucault and is worth reproducing here as well:

"*Now, in the name of the Muses, answer me this question about Cynicism: is it a form of insanity, a kind of life unworthy of a man, not to say a brutish tendency of the soul which denies all beauty, honesty, and goodness? … The disappearance of all reverence for the Gods and the discredit of all human prudence leads not only to the laws we identify with honor and justice being trampled under foot, but even those the Gods have engraved in our souls*

and which we fully believe without having to be taught that a divine being exists: it is to him that our eyes are turned ... Moreover, let us suppose also the rejection of the second, naturally sacred and divine law which orders total and absolute respect for the rights of others, and which calls on us not to introduce any confusion into this by speech, deeds, or secret impulses of the soul ... Does not this attitude deserve the barathrum? (Originally, a deep pit in Athens into which criminals were thrown which became used metaphorically to mean pit or abyss.) Should not those who preach these doctrines be banished, without blows of the thyrsi like expiatory victims ..., but put to death by stoning? For how do they differ ... from desert pillagers and coastal bandits who rob those who disembark? They despise death, it is said, as if these bandits were not affected by the same insanity!"

Of this portrait of Cynics Foucault himself says:

"*Here we have a... violent portrait of the Cynics, which this time does not attack the hypocritical imitation of philosophy so much as the fact that the Cynics are opposed to divine and human laws, and to all the forms of tradition or social organization. These are the two major points to which criticism of the Cynics are usually attached, but there are many others.*"

Already, then, from just one singular example, although others are both indicated and given, we get an image of the Cynic as an enemy of civilisation (for the things depicted which the Cynic is meant to despise, or which they obviously disdain, are in every case the things of civilisation). Moreover, as Foucault notes, the Cynic seems to imagine that philosophy itself, often practiced by the privileged in ancient Greece and Rome (Julian was the Emperor himself, of course!), is a natural endowment and not something that is the result of "culture, training or an apprenticeship". What people are "from nature" also

extends in the literature to the notion that people are kings – in the philosophical sense of the term – from nature too. In a world of gods, for example (as both Greeks and Romans were), simply EVERYONE is equally born a child of Zeus. It requires no royal lineage. This is pertinent when one asks what philosophy then was for the Cynic and Foucault has an answer:

"*for the Cynics, the function of philosophical teaching was not essentially to pass on knowledge but, especially and before all else, to give both an intellectual and moral training to the individuals one formed. It was a matter of arming them for life so that they were thus able to confront events.*"

The primary example here is the story told about Diogenes, the first Cynic among equals, who, it is said, was bought as a slave by one Xeniades who then employed him as the teacher of his children. Whether this tells a historical truth about Diogenes or not is moot but it certainly does tell one in regard to the fact that Cynics were imagined as those who performed a didactic function in regard to life, and the skills necessary for it, itself. Consequently, it is important that it is remarked historically that Diogenes essentially taught Xeniades' children independence and self-sufficiency (key Cynic values) whilst considering morality "to be the only genuinely philosophical discipline". (We may observe here that this might be the equivalent of regarding "How should we live?" as the only really significant philosophical question.) The Cynic life here is pictured as "an apprenticeship in endurance" which Foucault characterises as "essentially a teaching of struggle, which must teach what is needed for the struggle and indispensable for gaining victory." It is not remotely about book learning or the amassing of a body of knowledge but about the practical skill of living which was historically regarded as "a short cut to

virtue". This is illustrated in a letter pseudonomously ascribed to the Cynic Crates (companion of Hipparchia):

"*long is the way which leads to happiness through discourse (so: the way of discourse is the long way). The one which goes by daily exercises is a short cut. But many of those who follow the same aim as the dogs (the Cynic philosophers, 'Cynic' being derived from the Greek word for 'dog') flee those who put forward this way when they note how difficult it is. They cannot become dogs by this way, for exercise is naturally much more effective than discourse. Short way: the way of exercise. Long way: the way of discourse.*"

Of this Foucault remarks:

"*So you can understand how and why Cynic doctrine is so difficult to pinpoint to the extent that the passing on of the Cynic life essentially took place through this short way, without discourse, which was the way of exercise and apprenticeship.*"

All of this should be starting to appear wild, uncivilised and as simply a matter of natural endowment or ability to which is wedded proclivity and discipline. This is philosophy as "a mode of being and as a form... of ethics". This is not philosophy as a teaching or theory but as a practice, a way of actually living a life, a way you actually live your own life. This is where we come back to Foucault's interest in parrhesia as a matter of "the courage of truth" for it is his assertion that the Cynic's wild, uncivilised, civilisation-disdaining form of life is a form of "truth-telling" as a whole itself:

"*Cynicism presents itself essentially as a certain form of parrhesia, of truth-telling, but which finds its instrument, its site, its point of emergence, in the very life of the person who must thus manifest or speak the truth in the form of a manifestation of existence.*"

The truth of the Cynic, then, is their life, their existence, and how they manifest it. It is, as Foucault puts it, "the production of truth in the form of life". Yet it is here that we must address a major ancient description of the purpose of the Cynic life and mission, i.e. "change the value of the currency". There are various stories told about Diogenes (or perhaps also his father) in which he becomes tangled up with defacing the imagery on coins of currency in his home location – thus rendering them worthless. Diogenes Laertius tells such a story in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* by way of introducing Diogenes of Sinope, the prime example of the Cynic. There it is given as the reason why he left his homeland on the Black Sea coast of what is now northern Turkey, and came to Athens and Corinth at all. The story may be mythology filling in the greater reality which is that Cynics were known as those who defaced the currency of civilisation in order to give it a new value. But what is the meaning of the injunction? This is something Foucault wants to get to the bottom of as well:

"*What in fact does 'alter the value of the currency' (parakharattein to nomisma) mean? What should be stressed first of all with this theme of 'change, alter the value of the currency' is the connection—indicated by the word itself—between currency and custom, rule, law. Nomisma is currency; nomos is the law. To change the value of the currency is also to adopt a certain standpoint towards convention, rule, or law. Second, still with regard to this notion of parakharaxis; parakharattein (change, alter) does not mean devalue the money. We can sometimes find the important sense of 'defacing (altérer)' a coin so that it loses its value, but here the verb essentially and especially signifies: starting from a certain*

coin which carries a certain effigy, erase that effigy and replace it with another which will enable this coin to circulate with its true value. That the coin is not misleading about its true value, that its own value is restored to it by stamping it with another, better, and more adequate effigy, is what is defined by this important Cynic principle of altering and changing the value of the currency."

This is an interesting interpretation because Foucault is not simply saying the mission slogan "change/deface the currency" means "make currency worthless" so that there is no longer anything of worth in existence. For Foucault it means "give it its true (or a truer) value". This may well entail meaning that the currency becomes worthless for its previous (civilised) use. That is not denied. But it equally suggests that currency can legitimately have a value. It is rather a question of what that value is and clearly the civilised value is the one to be scratched off and defaced. Here the "truth-telling" with which Foucault is immediately concerned and the Cynic mission to "change the value of the currency" are seen to coincide. Cynics were deliberately penniless destitutes who begged, lived out in the open and had no possessions. They openly criticised and disdained the civilised way of life as both unnatural and ethically dubious whilst also decrying many civilised customs and conventions such as marriage (which I discussed in an earlier book of my own along with the Cynic concept of "dog marriage"). In other words, the Cynic had not chosen the easy or comfortable road. The Cynic had chosen the way of hardship. For the Cynic this was both to live an ethical life and to live the truth – but to do so as a scandal in the eyes of many of their contemporaries. Foucault sees this as important:

"*In the case of Cynic scandal—and this is what seems to me to be important and worth holding on to, isolating—one risks one's life, not just by telling the truth, and in order to tell it, but by the very way in which one lives. In all the meanings of the word (truth), one*

'exposes' one's life. (The Greek word 'truth' – aletheia – etymologically means an unconcealing.) That is to say, one displays it and risks it. One risks it by displaying it; and it is because one displays it that one risks it. One exposes one's life, not through one's discourses, but through one's life itself."

The Cynic, then, is "out in the open" – literally and metaphorically. Cynicism is a form of life which imagines that truth should be lived publicly as a life: "Cynicism is the form of philosophy which constantly raises the question: what can the form of life be such that it practices truth-telling?" It is a matter of "care of the self" – at once both a challenge to a personal discipline of living but also a lesson in truth to be taught (shown, unconcealed) to others. Thus, only what is necessary should be done and in that conclusion the nature/civilisation contrast is starkly backlit. For what is necessary and what is not? As ethical practice, however, this is also about consistency with one's own beliefs and values. One can only believe in "living according to nature" by actually living according to nature. The philosophy is not the belief or the value – it is the practice which examples the belief and the value. "There can only be true care of self if the principles one formulates as true principles are at the same time guaranteed and authenticated by the way one lives." This is where "change/deface the currency" comes back in as embodied truth, truth as a life or existence. In many respects this is the characteristic Cynic slogan, that which defines them in history. Foucault discusses this as a personal challenge to someone who takes the fact of their existence seriously (something, in others, that would be important to the person for whom "How should we live?" is a serious question) but as something which becomes of general ethical import (since the Cynic imagines that to address the ethical question "How should we live?" is something like the only real value of philosophy). But it is approached personally in either case, it is a matter of that Delphic principle also enunciated by Socrates: "know thyself". To know thyself is also to ask how one shall live,

to bring it into ethical debate with how one should live. It is Foucault's argument that the Cynics bring knowing thyself into dialogue with "defacing the currency" and that they do so in public as a matter of philosophical (i.e. ethical) education. This is because the very idea of that has truth-telling, public consequences:

"*There are, of course, a number of interpretations of this principle ('change the currency'), essentially around the theme that nomisma, the currency, is also nomos, the law, custom. The principle of altering the nomisma is also that of changing the custom, breaking with it, breaking up the rules, habits, conventions, and laws. It is very likely that this is how it was received and understood, whatever the original meaning of this expression.*"

Here it becomes important and interesting that the Cynics in their native Greek were literally called "dogs" (kunikos). A Cynic is essentially a "dogist" in modern parlance. This is being denominated by something wild and untamed rather than by something civilised and domesticated. A dog is something that might lick its genitals in the street or shit wherever it wants to just because it has the urge to. Like the words "gay" or "queer", 'Cynic' was originally an insult and, as in those other cases, those so called eventually began to take it up and own it on purpose and to play on the image. In it was seen both a value and a message that was important. In the following, Foucault presents an ancient four part depiction of the dog (i.e. the Cynic) with commentary upon it:

"*First, the kunikos life is a dog's life in that it is without modesty, shame, and human respect. It is a life which does in public, in front of everyone, what only dogs and animals dare to do, and which men usually hide. The Cynic's life is a dog's life in that it is shameless. Second, the Cynic life is a dog's life because, like the latter, it is indifferent. It is indifferent to whatever may occur, is not attached to anything, is content with what it has, and has no*

needs other than those it can satisfy immediately. Third, the life of the Cynic is the life of a dog, it received the epithet kunikos because it is, so to speak, a life which barks, a diacritical (diakritikos) life, that is to say, a life which can fight, which barks at enemies, which knows how to distinguish the good from the bad, the true from the false, and masters from enemies. In that sense it is a diakritikos life: a life of discernment which knows how to prove, test, and distinguish. Finally, fourth, the Cynic life is phulaktikos. It is a guard dog's life, a life which knows how to dedicate itself to saving others and protecting the master's life. Shameless life, adiaphoros (indifferent) life, diakritikos life (diacritical, distinguishing, discriminating, and, as it were, barking life), and phulaktikos (guard's life, guard dog's life...

You can see that it is not difficult to recognize a close kinship between these four, once again, canonical characteristics, picked out and distinguished in these terms in the traditional representation of the Cynics, and those characteristics I tried to identify last week which traditionally defined the (Greek) true life. Basically, the Cynic life is at once the echo, the continuation, and the extension of the true life (that unconcealed, independent, straight, sovereign life), but also taking it to the point of its extreme consequence and reversal. What is the shameless life if not the continuation, the pursuit, but also the scandalous reversal of the unconcealed life? The bios alethes, the life in aletheia, you recall, was a life without concealment, which holds nothing back, a life which was capable of having nothing to be ashamed of. Well, ultimately, this is the shameless life of the Cynic dog. The indifferent, adiaphoros life which needs nothing, which is content with what it has, with what it happens across, with what it is thrown, only continues, extends, takes to the extreme consequence, and scandalous reversal, of the unalloyed, independent life which was one of the fundamental characteristics of the true life. The diacritical, barking life which distinguishes between good and bad, friends and enemies, masters and others, is the continuation, but also the scandalous, violent, polemical reversal of the straight life, of the

life which obeys the law (the nomos). The life of the guard dog, of combat and service, which characterizes Cynicism, is also the continuation and reversal of that tranquil, self-controlled, sovereign life which characterized the true existence."

Foucault's point is obviously that the Cynics were Greeks (or at least Hellenistic) in cultural context. They did not live in a vacuum and were brought up in a world full of beliefs, ethics, values and lifestyles. As a consequence, their way of life must be understood as at least in dialogue with this (and with the prominent voices within it) if we are to regard them as real people who lived in a real world of consequence. So Foucault's interpretation is doing that by arguing that they actually try to embody Greek values, or take part in the debate about what those values should be, in their own way. They take such questions seriously and turn those values into a way of life, a way of life which impugns the way of life most Greeks were actually living whilst also contrasting with other Greek philosophical schools. They were trying to live a kind of true life and trying to characterise a true existence (which, again, is but more life as truth-telling). Here Foucault raises the question of if, in fact, the Cynics come to the conclusion that life must be "other" to the civilised life of Greece if it is actually to be "true" at all. And that is obviously an ethical question. The Cynic answer was then that the common life lived according to nature is the true life and not the civilised life of the Greek elites who carry the general population behind them in their wake as a culture.

It is for me especially to point out that the Cynics then choose wildness. They choose to be unconcealed (i.e. true) in public. They are without home and almost without clothes (only a cloak is reported as the standard item of clothing for a Cynic who, of course, owned nothing they could not carry with them). So in at least two senses they have a minimum of protection (although it is remarked they carried a staff with which they could

threaten aggressors if they choose to). Their whole lives, being in public, are potentially on display and this is one characteristic of being wild – for in the wild everything happens in public – and without shame. Foucault says:

"*An unconcealed life would neither hide anything bad nor do anything bad since it would not conceal anything. Now, the Cynics say, can there be anything bad in what nature wills and in what she has placed in us? And conversely, if there is something bad in us or if we do something bad, is this not because men have added to nature with their habits, opinions, and conventions? So that if non-concealment must guarantee and stand security for an entirely good life, of a life which is good because entirely visible, then this non-concealment must not take up and accept the usual, traditional limits of propriety, those limits on which men are agreed and which they imagine to be indispensable. Rather, it must bring to light what is natural in the human being, and therefore what is good. That is to say, non-concealment, far from being the resumption and acceptance of those traditional rules of propriety which mean that one would blush to commit evil before others, must be the blaze of the human being's naturalness in full view of all.*"

Here, then, to be natural, to be wild, is TO BE IN PUBLIC and to proclaim that nothing in public can "be an evil". This is "the naturalness which scandalizes":

"*This blaze of the naturalness which scandalizes, which transforms into scandal the non-concealment of existence limited by traditional propriety, manifests itself in the famous Cynic behavior. Diogenes ate in public, which was not easily accepted in traditional Greece. In particular, Diogenes masturbated in public. Crates too, having agreed to get married because his wife (Hipparchia) promised to lead exactly the same style, the same mode of life as him, made love with her in public. All of this constitutes the form of this non-concealed*

life, in terms of the principle that Diogenes and Crates often repeat, namely: how can we consider making love, having sexual relations to be an evil, since it has been implanted in our very nature? Since it has been implanted in our very nature, it cannot be an evil. So it does not have to be concealed. The Cynic public life will therefore be a life of blatant and entirely visible naturalness, asserting the principle that nature can never be an evil."

The reversal Foucault argues for here is that where, in standard Greek ethical teaching, the truth (unconcealment) was meant to be what led to or required propriety was, for the Cynics, that which led directly to a lack of it. For the Cynics, unconcealment, truth, leads to "the brazen life" of anaideia, the dissolution of artificial conventions of behaviour: wildness, independence, self-sufficiency. Foucault comments: "it is a question of defining an attitude which is entirely detached from those events over which one has no control." It is:

"*a material, physical, bodily dramatization of the principle of life without mixture or dependence. And this dramatization of the principle of independence in the form of life itself, of physical, material life, obviously takes the form of poverty.*"

It makes perfect sense to me that, given all this, the Cynic MUST choose a life of deliberate destitution. What, in nature, fathoms wealth in the way that (some) humans do? Nothing. As studies like Marcel Mauss' The Gift or David Graeber's *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* make clear, not even all humans think of wealth in the same way nor imagine an inequality or possession of it is either good or the point. Foucault, a historian of thought, here remarks that "the theme that the true life must be a life of poverty is obviously culturally very widespread and can be found in many other civilizations, philosophies, and, of course, in a great many religions" to make the point further. Marshall

Sahlins famously wrote an essay decades ago ("The Original Affluent Society") in which primitive "wealth" was simply being surrounded by a natural abundance of resources with which to fulfil simple bodily needs (a Cynic's paradise). By modern standards, such people were crude vagrants, literally wild men and women. But, nevertheless, "Cynic poverty is, of course, a real, material, and physical poverty. Cynic poverty is real, active, and indefinite." The Cynics choose this wild life of public naturalness on purpose and the fact they stick to a strict poverty is entirely consistent with it – for monetary wealth is entirely artificial, civilised and not anything anyone actually needs or requires. We could all get along perfectly fine tomorrow through simple cooperation if all the wealth in the world simply disappeared overnight since it is only a way of artificially ordering or lubricating relations and not a material need. And other ways are available, ways which produce a different sort of human being in the process – which is entirely the Cynic point:

"*Cynic poverty cannot be indifference to wealth and acceptance of a given situation. Cynic poverty must be an operation one carries out on oneself in order to obtain positive results of courage, resistance, and endurance. The dramaturgy of Cynic poverty is far from that indifference which is unconcerned about wealth, whether this be the wealth of others or one's own; it is an elaboration of oneself in the form of visible poverty. It is not an acceptance of poverty; it is a real conduct of poverty... It continues and is always looking for possible further destitution. It is a restless, dissatisfied poverty which strives to get back to the ground of the absolutely indispensable... It is a real poverty of dispossession, an indefinite poverty endlessly at work on oneself.*"

For many, however, moderns and not merely Greeks, poverty is dishonourable (which reminds us, once again, of the Cynic anaideia). It is a stain on one's character. It marks one as morally insufficient. No moral person could possibly allow themselves to become

destitute (and not merely poor), let alone choose it on purpose. (See here many ancient ascriptions of madness to the Cynic, an affinity with the irrational wild beast – a charge which is also sometimes applied to the similarly poverty-absorbed Jesus of Nazareth.) But then we read in Foucault's commentary that "For the Cynics, the systematic practice of dishonor is on the contrary a positive conduct with meaning and value" and that "this dishonor is actually sought after by the Cynics who actively look for humiliating situations which are valuable because they train the Cynic in resistance to everything to do with opinions, beliefs, and conventions" and we begin to understand that, for the Cynic, all this is an askesis, a training, a discipline. For the Cynic to be adoxia, without honour, was fully a part of this as a consequence of the decision for wildness that they have made. Civilisation runs away from wildness and the wild; it does not wish to be stained by that which it sees and identifies as a taint on its imagined rising above nature. The Cynic, on the contrary, embraces nature, seeing it not as a taint but rather how the Cynic "asserts his sovereignty, his mastery, through these tests of humiliation" that result as a consequence. And so the Cynic ends up giving "a positive value to animality" by re-embracing the wild:

"*This principle of a straight life which must be indexed to nature, and solely to nature, ends up giving a positive value to animality. And, here again, this is something odd and scandalous in ancient thought. In general terms, and summarizing considerably, we may say that in ancient thought animality played the role of absolute point of differentiation for the human being. It is by distinguishing itself from animality that the human being asserted and manifested its humanity. Animality was always, more or less, a point of repulsion for the constitution of man as a rational and human being.*

In the Cynics, in accordance with the rigorous and systematic application of the principle of the straight life indexed to nature, animality will play a completely different role. It will be charged with positive value, it will be a model of behavior, a material model in accordance with the idea that the human being must not have as a need what the animal can do without. There is a whole series of anecdotes on this: Diogenes observing how mice live, and Diogenes seeing a snail carrying its house on its back and deciding to live in the same way. When need is a weakness, a dependence, a lack of liberty, man must have no other needs than those of the animal, those satisfied by nature itself. In order not to be inferior to the animal, one must be capable of taking on that animality as reduced but prescriptive form of life. Animality is not a given; it is a duty. Or rather, it is a given, offered to us directly by nature, but at the same time it is a challenge to be continually taken up. This animality, which is the material model of existence, which is also its moral model, constitutes a sort of permanent challenge in the Cynic life. Animality is a way of being with regard to oneself, a way of being which must take the form of a constant test. Animality is an exercise. It is a task for oneself and at the same time a scandal for others. Assuming, in front of others, the scandal of an animality as a task for oneself is what the principle of the straight life indexed to nature leads to when this principle becomes the real, material, concrete form of existence itself. The bios philosophikos as straight life is the human being's animality taken up as a challenge, practiced as an exercise, and thrown in the face of others as a scandal."

This animality, this wild freedom, however it is valorised by civilisation with its currency, is not so valorised by the Cynic who seeks to deface such currency and alter its value. The Cynic animal imagines themselves a king, as earlier suggested. But this sovereignty is a wild and autonomous sovereignty, not one which reigns over subjects as political kingship seeks to, but one which makes each Cynic singularity sovereign. It is a declaration that each of us is sovereign:

"*This stance of the Cynic as anti-king king, as the true king who, by the very truth of his monarchy, denounces and reveals the illusion of political kingship, is very important in Cynicism.*"

So in the Cynic saying he is a king from and by nature he is also saying that political kings are no kings at all by petty convention or law. And if anyone can be a king anyway then what is the worth of political kingship? Is it not rather worthless? The prime literary historical example here is Alexander the Great's imagined meeting with Diogenes who, not so much as recognising who addresses him as he lies on the ground, simply instructs this burgeoning Emperor to get out of the sun which he is blocking by standing over the recumbent dog. Alexander had appeared in order to offer Diogenes whatever he could grant but Diogenes the anti-king disdains the very idea that Alexander can offer him anything needful at all. The story, of course, is quite possibly mythical and there is no real way on current evidence to definitively decide if it actually happened or not. But, as with many ancient stories about many varying figures, that they actually happened is often not the point anyway for they act as illustrations of ideas or teachings regardless of their objective factuality. Here the point is to contrast Diogenes the dog with Alexander the Emperor and Foucault picks up on this in some detail:

"*Alexander is a king, a king of the world, of men, a political king. But to assure this monarchy and be able to exercise it, he is forced to depend and actually does depend on certain things. To exercise his monarchy he needs an army, guards, allies, he needs armor (he appears with his sword). Diogenes needs absolutely nothing to exercise his sovereignty. He stands before Alexander naked in his barrel with no army, court, allies, or anything else. Alexander's monarchy is therefore quite fragile and precarious, since it depends on*

something else. That of Diogenes, on the other hand, is unshakeable and cannot be overturned, since he needs nothing to exercise it...

Diogenes sets the nature of a true king, like him. In the first place, a true king like Diogenes comes directly from Zeus. He is a son of Zeus, and not of a monarchical [lineage]. He is a son of Zeus in the sense that he has been formed directly on the model of Zeus himself. The sage's soul has been formed in full and perfect sovereignty. It is princely by nature and consequently needs no paideia (education). The sage's soul is not a cultivated soul; it did not have to acquire the monarchy and the ability to be a monarch through education. The princely soul is such by nature, without any paideia. It is endowed with what Dio Chrysostom calls andreia (both courage and, more generally, virility). He is quite simply a man. And his monarchy manifests itself in this virility, in the fact that he is a man. It is also megalophrosune-(greatness of soul). Virility and greatness of soul are what distinguish the son of Zeus, as opposed to the paideia, the education which the hereditary son of a king needs in order to become king in turn...

What distinguishes the kingship of a sovereign like Alexander, the condition for him to be able to exercise this sovereignty, is his ability to triumph over his enemies. It is by triumphing over his enemies that he assures his sovereignty over men. This is what Alexander says to Diogenes: When I am not only king of the Greeks, since I am that already, but also king of the Medians and the Persians whom I will have really vanquished, will I not then be fully and completely king? To which Diogenes replies: What! You will have defeated the Greeks, you will have defeated the Medians, and you will have defeated the Persians. But will you have defeated your true enemies? And these are the internal enemies, your faults and vices. The sage has no faults or vices. The king of the world, of men, may well battle against all

his enemies. He may well defeat them one by one. There will still always be this first and last, fundamental battle to be waged...

The last contrast between the king of men and the philosopher-king, the Cynic-king, is that the king of men is obviously exposed to every misfortune and reversal of fortune. He may lose his monarchy. The philosopher-king, the Cynic-king, on the other hand, will never cease being king. He is king forever, since he is king by nature."

What we really see laid out here in the consistently contrasting visions is a philosophy of the civilised and a philosophy of the wild. One is endowed by nature's order and the other is endowed by an order of human civilisation. The Cynics are products of human civilisation too to some extent, of course, but they are those who turn their critique back upon it in order to impugn it, to question if it was ever needed to begin with. They assert the values of the wild over civilisation. They are those who look within to find worth and value rather than finding it simply in external relations or empty displays of unethical power. This is to recognise that "How should one live?" is a matter of much more than the ordering of external relations and is fundamentally about lived values. It is to recognise that perhaps one has already been given all that one needs, from nature, simply by coming to be. It is to recognise that perhaps self-responsibility is all one ever really needs to pay attention to. The Cynic kingship is a self-ordering available to anyone who will take responsibility for it which disavows all external orderings, possible or actual, and in that it is once more wild. It is a struggle to be responsible for oneself and so to be autonomous and self-sufficient. But Foucault also says that the Cynic sees it as a matter of service. (Compare the poverty-eulogising Jesus of Nazareth, himself eulogised in ancient Christian books as a "servant king".) The Cynic is not a frothing maniac but is acting from reason – albeit that it is a wild reason and a feral logic. But inasmuch as the Cynic regards

philosophy as ethics, then he regards himself as having an ethical mission in and through his life and how he lives it. It is on this basis they are described as rulers of men or teachers of men and this is also why Foucault can describe them as “guard dogs”. The Cynic is nature’s natural antidote to the poison of civilisation and this can also be imagined as a battle and the Cynic as a militant:

“*The Cynic’s military or athletic battle is also the individual’s struggle against his desires, appetites, and passions. But it is also a battle against customs, conventions, institutions, laws, and a whole condition of humanity. It is a battle against vices, but these are not just the individual’s vices. They are vices which afflict humankind as a whole, the vices of men which take shape, rely upon, or are at the root of their customs, ways of doing things, laws, political organizations, or social conventions. The Cynic battle is therefore not simply that military or athletic battle by which the individual ensures self-mastery and thereby benefits others. The Cynic battle is an explicit, intentional, and constant aggression directed at humanity in general, at humanity in its real life, and whose horizon or objective is to change its moral attitude (its ethos) but, at the same time and thereby, its customs, conventions, and ways of living.*”

The Cynic is the one who, observing the wild and observing civilisation, has seen in the wild the more ethical life and who, valuing ethics above all else, has determined to live that life as mission, as teaching, as example and as truth. And so Foucault can begin to bring all these different facets of their meaning in Greek context together:

“*the Cynics reversed the idea of the unconcealed life by dramatizing it in the practice of nakedness and shamelessness; they reversed the theme of the independent life by dramatizing it in the form of poverty; and they reversed the theme of the straight life by*

dramatizing it in the form of animality. Well, we can also say that they reverse and invert the theme of the sovereign life (tranquil and beneficial: tranquil for oneself, enjoyment of self, and beneficial for others) by dramatizing it in the form of what could be called the militant life, the life of battle and struggle against and for self, against and for others."

The particular form of animus or militancy that Foucault can then ascribe to the Cynic is "an overt, universal, aggressive militancy; militancy in the world and against the world." He is careful to point out, as earlier intimated, that this is essentially the formation of "an other life" – but it is also lived in "an other world" for the Cynic imaginary of life and world very importantly reimagines both. Therefore:

"*the Cynic is someone who, taking up the traditional themes of the true life in ancient philosophy, transposes them and turns them round into the demand and assertion of the need for an other life. And then, through the image and figure of the king of poverty, he transposes anew the idea of an other life into the theme of a life whose otherness must lead to the change of the world. An other life for an other world.*"

This is a cherry-picked and far from complete analysis of Foucault's description of the Cynic in his lectures. I move on now, however, to William Desmond's analysis of the Cynic in his 2008 book, *Cynics*. Desmond has three of six chapters in which the meat of the Cynic character is set out in much more detail and I want to majorly concentrate on one of those chapters, the one which appraises the Cynic "life according to nature". It is notable that before this, however, Desmond makes a thorough analysis of the Cynic "renunciation of custom" that is the Cynic's rejection of civilisation and its ways:

"*The most obvious activity of the ancient Cynics was their renunciation of traditional proprieties, and since antiquity observers have been alternately inspired and disgusted by their brazen protests. The Cynics' rejection of custom is an interesting cultural phenomenon in its own right, and to understand it in detail would take one through the whole gamut of Greek social usages... From Diogenes until the last 'dogs' of the ancient world, the Cynics defined themselves first by 'snarling' at the institutions, rituals, beliefs and assumptions by which their contemporaries lived. To list their different acts of critique would be to compose a long priamel: 'Not this, not that, and definitely not that', says the Cynic in his scorn for all things merely conventional. In his seemingly universal nay-saying, the Cynic avoids traditional clothes, jewellery and bodily adornments for his own 'uniform'; he restricts his diet; does not live in a house; derides bathing, sports, the Games; scoffs at festivals, sacrifice, prayer and religious life generally; does not marry, dodges work and steers clear of the courts, assembly, army and other arenas of political participation. He even strives to bust out of old patterns of talking, and tosses up for himself a wild new language.*"

It is notable here that Desmond talks of a Cynic "renunciation of custom" (the title of his second chapter) and it will be instructive – before coming to his chapter which deals with the Cynic living "according to nature" – to take note of the comprehensive list of "customs" which the Cynics, according to Desmond, renounce:

1. Cynics rejected clothing and affectatious hygiene such as shaving and other cultured pampering or grooming which aims to "beautify" oneself. Their singular item of clothing was a thin cloak (the *tribon* – which could be folded double) and they were bearded, letting their hair grow as it would. They rejected the use of warm or hot water (which required use of fire, something they also rejected, regarding Prometheus, who brought this invention to men, as the corrupter of humanity). All this can be imagined as in the

cause of not artificially softening oneself and getting used to “luxuries” as the civilised tend to do – then coming to rely on such things and being lost without them. Cynics often carried a bag (a *pera*) in which all their worldly possessions were kept. There is a suggestion that all this was likely cultural too in that Cynics thought their rough appearance was appropriately manly.

2. Cynics rejected housing and having homes and were deliberately “homeless” as a result. Instead, they found shelter (e.g. for sleeping) wherever they could (such as public buildings, nooks and crannies of the city they were in, even large jars [*pithoi*] used for storing supplies as in the case of the legend told of Diogenes). In this, they literally and fundamentally rejected the city-based and housed living that the culture of Greece itself had been nurturing as well as its property-based ethos of land ownership. The Cynic, then, had no fixed abode.

3. Cynics ate what they could find and, given their circumstances, were not cultivators of foodstuffs or diets. They would take from civilised sources as they could afford or find things in the wild. But they generally had a prejudice against anything cooked (especially cooked meat) and can be found depicted as eating things raw. In general, the more preparation a food needs, the more they would be opposed to it in principle since this is “human invention” and so artificial. This includes even that most Greek of drinks, wine, with Cynics often being presented “as resolute water-drinkers” as a result. (However, none of this is to say that the Cynic would turn up his nose at a prepared meal he should come upon if it can immediately satisfy his appetite or assuage his hunger. The point of the principle is not to become habituated to an artificial diet and to treat food as that which simply satisfies one’s hunger or appetite. Therefore, Cynics eat; they do not “dine”.)

Cynics also rejected the notion that eating was a private activity carried out indoors rather than outside in public, something which Greek culture in general often frowned upon.

4. Cynics appear to have gone to many habitual Greek public gatherings (from symposia to gymnasia to public baths or festivals – even the Olympics) merely to denounce the other attendees and partakers as overly cultured "perfumed degenerates" who were enthusiastic in the corruption of their own animality and wildness. In this they can be seen as those who both denounce and renounce Greek cultural sociality in terms of what they imagine its effects to be (i.e. detrimental).

5. Cynics rejected Greek sexual morality where "Through pagan antiquity, both Greek and Roman, there were no strict taboos against pre-marital sex, the use of prostitutes or homosexuality" but nevertheless presented as both "more shameless and more moralistic". It is perhaps best to regard sex in the case of the Cynic as just one more appetite that may need to be satisfied from time to time as simply and functionally as possible. Hence Diogenes masturbates in public, imagining this is something as normal and regular (and uncontroversial) as eating something if you are hungry. On the other hand, Cynics are generally against overindulging sexually or becoming slaves to sexual appetite or culture. In all things, including sex, self-control is important. It will be noted, of course, that Cynics were almost uniformly single men who thought of themselves as having an existential mission. Thus, wives, girlfriends, pleasure houses and the like, were not top of their things to get involved in and could be seen by them as societal distractions or possible snares. There are Cynic anecdotes against prostitution, the dangers of attractive women and how being in love is to "take pleasure in a misfortune". Stoking the sexual appetite on purpose can be seen as only leading to destructive entanglements. Much better to just use your hand to satisfy the appetite which, in itself,

is not shameful at all. None of this, of course, is to argue that Cynics were ideologically opposed to sex. Rather, it is a matter of practicality and the consequences of actions which, if one is not careful, can become lifestyles with consequences of their own.

6. Related to this, of course, would be the Cynic's view on family. A simple way to describe this is as Desmond himself does: "if a Cynic did not have a house (*oikos*), neither did he have any of its appurtenances." In general, Desmond suggests that the Cynic saw families, and domestic arrangements/relations in general, as "impediment[s] to freedom". Cynics in general did not have much good to say about having or taking a wife such that the only conclusion can be "don't marry!". Here Desmond references the "radical individualism" of the Cynic – with the exception proving the rule being the dog-marriage of Crates and Hipparchia. What is notable there, of course, is that even in its recitation this only proceeded after demonstrating how well matched and equally dedicated to the Cynic life of having nothing they both were. (Epictetus makes this point by saying Crates married "another Crates".) If one can imagine few men being drawn to Cynicism, one can imagine almost no women being drawn into it at all. And so it seems the case. One needs to imagine here, on this subject as with others of relevance to Cynics, that practicality is as important as principle for them. This is their guiding ethos. Marriage, families, children, domestic arrangements, do not forward their agenda of emancipation according to nature and, consequently, they generally aver from the whole business on practical grounds as much as principled ones. Consider, then, this appraisal from William Desmond:

"*the Cynics did not share Aristotle's view that marriage is natural, indispensable both to one's basic humanity and to the 'good life'. Far less did they regard it with romantic eyes, as if to meet 'the one' and share all one's days together were the consummation of happiness, devoutly to be wished. On the contrary, marriage breeds attachments, quarrels, trivial*

worries and, at best, a conventional happiness, that is, a complacent habituation to daily routine. A married person is not free, and if he seeks escape through adultery, he may risk being killed."

I am reminded here of John Cage's oft made wise assertion that "you will only make matters worse". Cynics were those who, in general, thought marriage, family, children, domestic arrangements, would "only make matters worse". Consequently, they self-justified their own choices as in the famous passage from Epictetus' *Dissertations*:

"'*How then', asked the young man, 'will a Cynic preserve society'? In the name of God, man, who is the greater benefactor to mankind? Those who bring forth two or three ugly-snouted children to take their place, or those who watch over all mankind as best they can, observing what they do, how they spend their time, what they care for, and what they disregard contrary to their duty?*" (Diss. 3.22.77)

Desmond points out here, correctly, that there is some tendentious arguing going on for no Cynic could argue that sex and its regular consequence, pregnancy and child birth, was unnatural. But its just that it wasn't really a Cynic problem since they were almost uniformly not going to be involved in it or its consequences. Consequently, it was something they are not reported to have been much concerned with. This was a problem for the breeders not the abstainers. There are, however, varying anecdotes which argue everything from that it would not matter if humanity died out as a result of non-procreation to men, women and children living communally (rather than in privatised families) to accomplish the task of raising children. Here the Cynics, like Plato in his *Republic*, regard the nuclear family as convention rather than as the naturally given order of things.

7. Cynics generally rejected the idea of property which, in historical context, also means they generally rejected slavery (and also wealth, money). This rejects what Desmond depicts as a somewhat Aristotelian conventional view of Greek domesticity as comprising husband, wife, children and property, some of it inanimate (as in land, buildings, tools, etc.) and some of it animate (animals and slaves – the latter of which Aristotle actually refers to as "living tools"). These can all again be seen as binds and so impediments to freedom. It is notable that several Cynics are anecdotally reported to have become enslaved (including Diogenes) and yet we know that their own view of themselves was that, regardless of external circumstances, they were not merely free as of their own inalienable nature but no less than kings in their own right. Such teaching given in public can only contrast harshly with the traditional Greek view of things that seems to constrict and contain by comparison. Such a view comes to seem libertarian when contrasted with a culture which entirely institutionalised both property and slavery through advancing centuries. Desmond elucidates the Cynic view on slavery, for example, as one in which not only the slave becomes controlled but the master does too – for he has given himself domestic shackles and concerns external to himself. He comes to rely on a slave and that impugns the Cynic impetus to independence and self-sufficiency.

8. If we turn to wealth and money explicitly we find that the Cynic entirely rejects it in favour of rethinking what wealth even really is. Here the Cynic imperative to "deface the currency" is obviously brought into the argument and Desmond wants to link currency – *nomisma* – with custom or law – *nomos* (these words are etymologically related). Indeed, Desmond suggests "The particular formulation of the motto therefore suggests the identity of the two, as if customary relationships (*nomoi*) were, in the Cynics' view, dominated by coins (*nomismata*), money and greed." As with a Jew from Nazareth, the Cynics reserve their most biting condemnations for money and the rich, "condemning

them wholesale for avarice, hubris, arrogance, injustice, profligacy and so forth". The Cynics' deliberate destitution can only be seen as performative rejection of a lifestyle ordered by wealth and the requirement to earn a living. (The Cynics habitually begged instead and it doesn't seem bizarre to imagine that there is something didactic in this either.) Desmond links New Testament attitudes to wealth and poverty to Cynic ones when suggesting that the saying "The love of money is the root of all evil" is "probably originally a Cynic saying", noting Diogenes Laertius puts something very similar on the lips of Diogenes of Sinope himself. Certainly we can say that those who reduce themselves to a bare minimum of possessions, refuse work in preference for being seemingly idle and glean their needs from their surroundings are making very strong and committed points about the worth of doing otherwise. It is also to make the point that wealth, whatever its form, is entirely conventional. The wealth is not inherent and no one ever needs it at all for one can satisfy one's actual needs whilst having nothing. The Cynic consequently sees frugality (*euteleia*) as a didactic virtue in this regard and lack of wealth, and a life built upon it, as a source of happiness. The destitute will never have to worry someone is taking what's theirs or if something is losing its value. A key thing to remember here, however, is that in attacking currency the Cynic also attacks culture and even civilisation. They are seeking to deface one system of value in order to replace it with another. They have rethought life from the ground up and transvalued values.

9. Cynics rejected the relative complexity of civilised life, with its laws and customs and institutions and relations and expectations (and, just as crucially, its consequences as a result), for the comparative simplicity of living according to the satisfaction of one's needs. They were those who imagined that living simply, and in simplicity, had better consequences in general than living in ways which multiplied the consequences in

unforeseeable ways. “With complexity and complication comes more trouble” could be a Cynic saying in this respect. And the Cynic would save themselves this trouble.

10. Cynics did not reject much on purely ideological grounds, rather, they wanted to live in ways which promoted their laid back attitude to life in its essentials – as in the satisfaction of natural needs. This is an attitudinal matter which cuts across cultural ways of living entirely and at a fundamental level and is because customs and conventions, once established, essentially become self-supporting and unquestioned, even invisible. It is only when, or if, one questions how one is living in its fundamentals that things like customs or conventions would be noticed, highlighted or tripped over. The interesting thing here is that Cynics consequently required a training (askesis) for this since they, just like any others of their time and place, had been brought up as children within a civilised culture they then subsequently had to think and imagine themselves out of to the extent that it became a new practice. They thought of this as labour or struggle (*athlos, ponos)* and culturally took Heracles (he of the twelve labours) as an example. Their only possible reward, however, could be virtue within a meaningful ethics of living as they saw it. Cynics were consequently self-defined, autonomous people who took on a culture by creating their own and judging it, and they themselves, superior as a consequence.

11. Cynics rejected the politics, and the political institutions and practices, of their day. This is not unrelated to what has been said before for how people lived – in cities – is a part of the Greek conception of politics itself. Aristotle, for example, defined human beings as those that naturally belong to the city (the *polis*, from which we get the English “politics”. Politics is, etymologically, the business of the city). Those who thought like Aristotle tended to justify the city, or city-state, as an extension of human nature and a way to maximising human social and rational potential. Hence people became so and so

of such and such a place and what city you came from was imagined to say something about your character. Cynics rejected this, Diogenes, for example, proclaiming himself a "citizen of the world" (literally, a cosmopolitan) which is an entire rejection of the politics of politically ordered or denominated territories, something which situates you definitively as an outsider in relation to all named places with their own polities. (This was being *atimia* – without civic rights or protections – and which, within Greeks polities, was often thought of, and used, as a severe punishment. It denied people access to civic justice or public buildings, typically speaking, as well as to the right to conduct business within city precincts. Being *atimia* was much like being in exile.)

Cynics did not take part in elections. They would not stand for political office or take part in political institutions. They refused to be on juries and even decried as demagogues regular political figures who were giving political speeches. They were against flattering the powerful or wealthy, whether kings or plutocrats, arguing that if one learned self-sufficiency one would never need to. This was all a part (and was thus an essential part) of their rethinking human existence whole and entire in both its meaning and consequences. When Diogenes goes through the marketplace in broad daylight, having lit a lantern, "looking for a human being", he is explicitly making the claim that how people have ordered themselves (politically no less so than in other ways) has dehumanised them. This denunciation of civilised politics extends to war which is only politics manifested as simple violence. Cynics can imagine war is unnatural for no other animal musters its forces in order to wipe out an enemy kind. Consequently, they generally think of war as stupid and pointless with no winners on either side. But then they reject the politics of hierarchy and organisation which could lead to war anyway and so this is hardly surprising.

12. In the ancient world religion and religious beliefs pervaded society in a way that would be hard for the more secularised people of today to understand. It was thus a significant part of culture and consequently required Cynics to take a stance regarding it. I have already reported on Desmond's claims that Cynics attended various festivals – many of which had religious connotations or were even considered primarily religious occasions – as kinds of heckling outsiders. This appears, through reams of various anecdotes, to be the general attitude of Cynics to religion as well. They are aware of gods and religion as cultural realities in society but, being less than enthusiastic adherents, they keep themselves to pithy or rationalistic observations (such as that prophets either can tell the future or they can't, etc.). This does not stop Cynics comparing themselves to gods, however, for gods are clearly self-sufficient and so the Cynic desire for a similar self-sufficiency is, in this sense, divine. Cynics can, then, use religious language or ideas rhetorically. We should probably hesitate to imagine Cynics as a class were studied atheists, however, for the fact is, as in many other things, they were not interested enough in the subject in particular to become dogmatic about it either way. It was, then, merely a cultural reality with which they might need to interact or which they could use.

13. Across the many various books I have written about anarchy and anarchism I have spoken several times about the need to live differently if you would create a different society. I hope that readers of this book, and particularly this chapter, are starting to get an inkling that Cynics were exactly people that did this. Desmond's next point here actually works out the consequences of this for if one would live differently then one has to think differently and if one would think differently then one needs to create a different language that expounds upon, conceptualises and imagines new meanings, values and relations. Here William Desmond argues that Cynics created precisely such a new language as part of this intellectual-material endeavour. He says:

"*The first and perhaps most obvious aspect of this new 'language' is the Cynic vocabulary of gesture. Actions speak louder than words: whistling to the crowd, eating beans noisily, farting, belching, urinating, defecating in public, masturbating, rolling about in the sand, embracing snowy statues, carrying a tuna or bowl of soup across a crowded marketplace, sleeping in a pithos, carrying a lantern around at noon, and innumerable other contortions, twists and shapes: all these loudly trumpet the brazen freedom and antinomianism of the Cynics.*"

This extends to giving people the finger as Desmond further explains:

"*One gesture in this dialect of renunciation is sticking up the middle finger. 'Flipping the bird' has not always and in all cultures been taken as a sign of contempt, but various anecdotes show that the Cynics did use it as such. Thus, Diogenes flicked the finger at Demosthenes. In scholarship on Cynicism, Diogenes is almost invariably quoted for saying that 'most people ... are so nearly mad that a finger makes all the difference'. But this makes sense really only in the context of the full anecdote: 'For, if you go along with your middle finger stretched out, some one will think you mad, but if it is the little finger, he will not think so" (DL 6.35). For Diogenes there is no reason why one should get angry at being shown the middle finger rather than the little finger. It is a crazy custom. It is crazy too to get angry at any expression of contempt or dishonour: what should one care what other people think? Postmodern thinkers such as Peter Sloterdijk have been interested in Cynic gestures like this, arguing that bodily language is the best way to escape the hegemony of logos, science, grand narratives and all self-justifying ideologies.*"

Cynics were evidently interested in rhetoric which, in Greek context, has connotations of speech which is persuasive and speech which appeals to its hearers to take a point from it.

At least in historical records of them, they appear witty or clever with words as a result. They can use rhymes or puns and play on the meanings of words. They can also invent words (Desmond suggests that Diogenes' self-description as *cosmopolitēs* [cosmopolitan, a citizen of the world, and so of no earthly political state] may be such an example). Accepting the cultural insult of "dog" and leaning into it is yet another aspect of the Cynic rhetoric and world creation – although they could also be described on occasion as anything from spies or inspectors to teachers or rulers depending on how they were viewed or the occasion. Even in the whole business about "defacing the currency" there is wordplay and cultural meaning-making going on. It is further suggested that "Cynic writers" attempted new literary forms as suited their purposes. For example, "For the Cynics, the *paignion* became a light-hearted ditty with a satirical slant, praising the small and seemingly contemptible, poking fun at the grand and mighty." We also get many and various literary pieces in praise of things like lentil soup, gnats or hair. In all of these things, being language-based, the ultimate task is the imagination of another life in a another world. We should not forget, as Foucault did not in his analysis, that amongst the most Cynic of characteristics was *parrhesia* – bold speech. Bold, in this case, in its imagination as much as anything else.

14. Finally, in Desmond's recitation, the Cynics rejected Greek customs (both intellectual and material) about death and particularly the burial of the dead. The Greeks had definite ideas about the Underworld and sending the dead there (rowed towards Hades and Persephone by Charon across the River Styx, a coin in the deceased's mouth to pay his toll) but it appears Cynics, in their imagined more natural logic, felt more comfortable in disdaining the whole idea. It is as if to say that death is nothing to worry about because by the time it affects you you are dead and so have nothing to concern yourself about. In this respect, several Cynics are said to suffer (in ways often not historically likely or

recoverable and which no doubt also serve rhetorical purposes) somewhat tragi-comic deaths or even end their own lives:

"*the stories of Cynic deaths are rather laughable. Diogenes died attacked by dogs, or by holding his breath, or by eating a raw 'many-foot' (i.e. octopus) (DL 6.77; cf. Luc. Vit. Auct. 10, Catapl. 7). Metrocles strangled himself (DL 6.95). Menippus hanged himself because a thief stole his stuff (6.100). Calanus the gymnosophist burned himself on a pyre (Arr. Anab. 7.4.1–6), and Peregrinus did the same at the Olympics. Demonax starved himself to death. Here some individual details may be invented: breathing is an involuntary function and one cannot die by holding one's breath. By contrast, the reports of Calanus and Peregrinus are no doubt true, given the thousands of witnesses present.*

Regardless of particular details, however, the stories and reports collectively suggest that the Cynics not only condoned suicide but may have even encouraged it...

Suicide may... be final proof of the Cynic's freedom. Rather than clinging to life desperately, the Cynic winks at fortune and says 'I choose death'. He wills his own end, often choosing one that will epitomize and crown his whole life. Similarly, the 'life according to nature' finds a natural end in the Cynic's death. The Cynic transcends the merely conventional fear of death and so demonstrates that dying too is natural and a part of life. Finally, there is a point even to the reports of silly deaths by dog-bite or self-asphyxiation; having passed through life as through a festival, the Cynic will also go out with a laugh, and not even oblivion can make him glum."

Now having listed these 14 examples of ways the Cynics rejected the customs of their civilisation, William Desmond moves to describing what their "living according to nature"

amounts to instead. Here the first and most important point is that the ancient Greek Cynics were not like those modern misanthropes who can often be found carping and criticising from the sidelines at almost everything today. The Cynic in this context first and foremost LIVES according to nature. In other words, this is most importantly of all a consistent action, one consequential for the Cynic's entire life henceforth. They put their arse on the line because:

"*Living fully in the moment, without great hopes or fears, is for the Cynic the only way to become virtuous and happy: natural living brings the greatest pleasures, and the right pleasures. If contemporary people have forgotten elemental happiness, it is no matter: one can regain it by training oneself with much ascetic 'work' (ponos)*"

Yet what is "nature" here? Desmond says:

"*The Cynic renounces customs in order to live in accordance with nature, but what, one may ask, is nature? The question is a large one and this single word, 'nature', has been a battleground of rival worldviews. Ancient philosophers waged their wars over it also, and to understand Cynicism properly within this ancient context, one must appreciate some of the major Greek conceptions of what nature as a whole is. We may begin with the word itself. The Greek physis gives rise to English words such as physics, physical and physiology and, like the English 'nature', physis was used in a wide variety of contexts. Greeks spoke of the physis of fire or iron, for example, or of a geographical region, a tool, an individual, a biological species and so forth. As a derivative of the Latin natura, 'nature' does not carry the same resonance for an English speaker as physis did for a Greek. In it, a Greek speaker could always detect its root, the transitive verb phyein, meaning 'to bring forth, produce, put forth'. Thus the earth 'puts forth' (phyei) plants, causing them to grow. Plants are ta*

phyta, and this word could in turn be extended to other living things, even human beings. In Plato's Timaeus, for example, a human being is described as a 'heavenly plant' (phyton ouranion) (Pl. Ti. 90a) whose mind is rooted in the heavens, as it were: human beings are distinguished by their upright posture, by their rationality and ability to look up at the stars as well as to desire the eternal, and thus might be regarded as planted in eternity, growing from their heads down. Other related words are those for 'parents' (hoi physantes, or 'those who caused [children] to grow'); and for natural things generally (ta physika)."

But that all said, are we much closer to an answer to the question? Desmond also reports that there is no known work attributed to a Cynic (let alone an existing one) which is called "On Nature" and he further reports that Cynics actually seem to have had a startling lack of curiosity (unlike many philosophers both then and since) about how nature might be imagined to work (i.e. that which we now call "science"). Nature, for the Cynic, was then not a matter of scientific study or philosophical grounding. Rather, it appears more to be "the source of all good and all value", something which better fits the Cynic perception of philosophy as a matter mostly of ethics. This perhaps leads us back to our question "How should we live?". One understanding of this question which Desmond shares is then the following:

"*Nature is a realm of violence and competition, a struggle for existence. This image is applied mainly to organic nature, for the aspect of nature most obvious to us (as organisms that must fight to live and propagate) is the struggle of organisms with their environment and each other. But some thinkers have regarded this aspect of organic life as basic to inorganic nature also: here, subatomic particles, atoms, molecules, the earth as a whole, and all seemingly non-living things also demonstrate a kind of will to persist and propagate, a conatus essendi, or, as the neo-Cynic Nietzsche argues, a 'will to power'.*"

A further observation, attributed to Anaximander, also has it that “an organism lives by robbing other organisms of their lives” and this philosopher can also be interpreted as saying that life is basically based on “robbery” or “injustice” as one living thing takes of the resources of another. In this Anaximander sounds like a Greek version of Thomas Hobbes who imagines at least some human lives “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”. In comparison, Desmond says of the Cynics that:

“*In the Cynics’ view... the only ‘nature’ to be known is what one experiences here and now: this ‘nature’ is like an ever-present treasure trove from which one can draw up endless pleasures, and so one should not be deluded into searching any further.*”

I think at the heart of this is the question “How is nature proceeding?” How, in other words, is nature – that which produces or puts forth of itself – going about its business? This is done, it seems to me, in a context in which it is to be argued we have something to learn from the answer or even merely from the phenomena to be observed. (Although not from our position as “observers” for we are not observers. We are participants entangled in events and in the whole.) Thus, the question actually being asked in this approach is “How should one live in accordance with nature?” (which is a slight development on “How should we live?”) where there is not simply one way even to regard this question, let alone to answer it. Desmond remarks that this question itself “is fundamental to ancient philosophy as a whole” and this is important for it situates the Cynic interest in the question and giving it an answer in a plausible history in reality.

Indeed, exploring this general historical question further we discover that Greek thought in history prior to the Cynics – in the case of the Sophists who developed the idea of rhetoric and argument so much – “began to distinguish between *physis* (nature) and

nomos (custom, law)". This would develop into an habitual distinction between things existing either naturally "or due to human invention and contrivance" – and so "according to nature" or "according to custom". And so a typical philosophical question for the Sophists could be "given any entity X, does X exist by nature or custom?" An example would be to ask if it is natural to bury the dead or if it is merely customary to bury them. Of course, in even asking the question it is imagined there are stakes in doing so and that in something being natural or not something meaningful is being articulated. You may think this does not matter much. But what if, as Desmond reports, you find other people who eat their dead rather than burying them? What's "natural" or not might then seem to carry more weight – and when it does you find that this concern spreads and applies to more and more things quite naturally and irresistibly but also possibly disturbingly. Are gods natural? Is slavery? Is money? How about kinds of sexual relations? Is one kind of person "naturally" better than another kind? "How should one live in accordance with nature?" becomes an all-consuming question.

This explanation has the advantage of showing us that the Cynics are being ethical when they judge things "according to nature" and they are taking up a historically ethical position in regard to a cultural debate ongoing in their time and place which values "what is natural" in a certain way. There were those in their historical culture (Herodotus, Pindar) who argued that "custom is king of all" and that, consequently, one should, in a way very conservative, "do as the Romans do" when in Rome, etc. But this is obviously not the Cynic conclusion where ANY conclusion is bound to be rhetorical in one way or another. One is then arguing for a particular ethical construction of nature itself in valuing things "according to nature". One is making a claim about nature and using that claim about nature as an ethical guide. Which is all only to point out that Cynicism was a rational means of existence, something argued out and with a logic and reason of its own.

Cynicism IS a response to the question “How should one live?” in the light of the question (and the values which motivate) “How should one live in accordance with nature?” In fact, in Greek context, it was far from the only one. Desmond expressly examples the Calliclean, Platonic, Aristotelian, Epicurean and Stoic positions on these issues besides the Cynic position. This is only to point out, once more, that Cynics were real people living out what they thought were real answers to the concerns of their time and place. They were not alone in their assumptions or in considering these issues important. Their specific answer, however, was their own.

Of course, I am only interested in the Cynic answer here so if you want the others you’ll have to read Desmond’s book or a history of Greek philosophy. When it comes to that Cynic answer, however, we get “Cynic simplicity”. Desmond writes:

“*For (the Cynics), ‘nature’ is almost synonymous with a single world: simplicity. ‘Simplify, simplify, simplify!’ says Henry David Thoreau and, in the Cynics’ case, one consequence of their great simplification is the abandonment of any extended philosophy of nature: the Cynics did not study the heavens, earth or organisms in any detail. They made some observations about dogs, mice, hares, sheep, deer, lions, frogs, larks, storks and the like, but all with a view to promoting their ethic of simplifying and stripping away unnecessary desires and customs.*”

I think one should take note of this “will to simplification” (which pits nature against a complicating civilisation in which one is likely to get lost and eventually find oneself supporting increasing until entirely artificial and unnecessary customs merely for their own sake) without falling into one fairly obvious trap, that trap being “Where is the line between what is natural and what is not?” The way to approach this question is by

answering that that difference is ALWAYS RHETORICAL and never materially absolute. As Desmond then says:

"*where one exactly divides the natural from the unnatural is unclear, and none of the [Greek philosophical] Schools attempts a precise division. Nevertheless, it may be foolish to ask for geometrical precision in such matters, and there is a rough sense in the distinction, which provides grounds for what could be called an ethic of moderation. Nobody needs to own hundreds of houses and buildings, land in various countries, armies of slaves, and gold and silver beyond measure, like Petronius' Trimalchio. Those who like Callicles are always craving more, more and ever more – more money, more power, more sexual experiences, more types of expensive foods and wines – and are afflicted by that vice that the Greeks called pleonexia, fall into a life that is not only unnatural, but positively harmful and evil, both for others and themselves.*"

As a result, Desmond wants to categorise the Cynics most vehement of all Greeks' desire for living "according to nature" (understood as "simplicity") in three ways:

"*Cynic naturalism might be characterized by three main headings:*

(i) simplicity of natural desire;
(ii) the bounty of the natural world;
and
(iii) man's natural fitness for his environment."

As a consequence:

"*the Cynic boasts that he lives in utmost simplicity, without house, furniture, cups, weapons, clothes, jewellery or money: in short, without the products of human craft and technology. Unhoused, unwashed, unshaven, unshod and almost unclothed, eating figs, lupin-beans, lentils and whatever else he finds growing in the fields or hills nearby, the Cynic is an 'all-natural' philosopher who would, like Thoreau, simplify everything. Eat when hungry, drink when thirsty. Seek shelter from the elements when you have to. Relieve sexual needs when they arise. Use only what is immediately available. Live here, now. All this is the wisdom of the animals that eat what is nearby, drink from the closest stream or pond, hide in a cave or hole or whatever is available and copulate when nature urges. There is nothing shameful in any of this, the Cynic argues, for if the need or desire is natural, then surely the satisfying of it is natural too, no matter where one is. If the desire is spontaneous, shouldn't one satisfy it spontaneously also? In the notorious anecdote, then, when Diogenes masturbates in the marketplace, he is only living 'according to nature'. What is unnatural, in the Cynics' perspective, is to hide away behind thick walls, fornicating with slaves and gorging oneself on peacocks and exotic foods carried across deep seas, at great cost in money and lives. Furthermore, nature is bountiful and will provide for all natural needs*."

Here the idea, it seems to me, is that one should fit into a natural environment in a simple way that does not disturb it but which supports your own existence simply from its natural bounty and its natural mode of operation. Thus, it is not a matter of instituting and maintaining complex supply chains in the way that a city (or even more so a civilisation) requires, something which can only exploit, change and ultimately deplete nature by its very existence. Rather, one should form oneself in such a way as to become a part of it, something, in a sense, which is cooperating and co-existing with it. This is where "training" and "labours" come in – not thought of as work but as self-actualisation, as

becoming more natural (because more in tune with nature) oneself. I quote Desmond here at length:

"*Although bountiful nature easily provides for all simple needs, the Cynics stress that human beings are not immediately at home in nature, but must struggle to regain their rightful place in it. Human beings foolishly separate themselves off from the natural world, congregating in large cities, living inside houses, covering their bodies with clothes, regulating their waking hours with tyrannical clocks and an unquestioned concatenation of customs that only lull them into a different sort of sleep. The artificiality of nomos is perpetuated from generation to generation, as children are born and put into 'swaddling clothes' of various sorts, from which many never emerge. Born into a culture and its set of proprieties, the individual can become defined, even bound, by them. In the Cynics' view, this process of enculturation and of 'civilizing' the human animal only diminishes his or her happiness and freedom. To break one's chains requires struggle, and initially at least it is more painful to struggle than to sit still. This image of breaking free from the chains of custom may have been common: Antiphon describes nomoi as 'chains of nature' (Fr. 4.29), while Plato in his allegory of the cave envisages prisoners blinking at shadows on the wall: these shadows are the city's customs, as well as all natural events – indeed, all sensible phenomena, which lie like so many fetters on the benighted consciousness, blinkering it to the higher reality outside. The Cynics switch metaphors, holding that one must endure ponoi, askēsis, athloi and much talaipōria in order to regain one's true nature.*

These words are most associated with athletics, the Olympic Games and their mythic founder, Heracles. Heracles' twelve labours were athloi; according to Cynic and Stoic allegory, he endured them for the good of mankind. He killed the Nemean Lion with his bare hands, shot down the Stymphalian Birds, and in general cleared the earth of monsters and

criminals, so great was his philanthrōpia. All of this was hard labour, athlos. The related adjective athlos means 'wretched' and 'in pain', and an athlete (athlētēs) is literally one who is in pain, either because he is training for competition, or competing in the hot dust at the Games themselves. Another word that the Cynics played on is ponos, meaning both 'labour' and 'pain' at once (e.g. D. Chr. 8.16; Epict. Ench. 29.6–7). Heracles' labours were often denoted his ponoi, and Plato's Socrates is one of the first philosophers to liken his own philosophical 'work' to Heracles' (Pl. Ap. 22a6–8). The Cynics play even more extensively on this conceit, as they undergo ascetic 'labours' to train themselves for the wise, natural life. These ponoi involve physical pain: rolling in the hot sand, embracing snowy statues, walking barefoot on snow and enduring summer heat, winter cold, hard beds and little food. Their labours also include exercises in disappointment and psychological pain. Rather laughably, for instance, Diogenes is said to have begged money from statues, so as to get used to rejection, and many Cynics-in-training shaved half their heads (DL 6.33), and carried tuna fish, pots of lentils and other embarrassing objects across a crowded space so as to get used to the whistles and jeering. That is, one hardens oneself to shamelessness so as not to be overawed by the taboo-bound multitude. Such physical and psychological 'labours' constitute the Cynic's askēsis, another word with definite connotations of athletic training but with the added notion of 'perfecting'. Its English derivative is 'asceticism', and so the Cynic becomes an ascetic of sorts, training through pain for a hard, simple life 'according to nature'.

Such a natural life is possible, the Cynic argues, contrary to those sceptics who think such human products as buildings, shoes and clothes are necessary. For the Cynics, nature (like Aristotle's Housekeeper) does provide, and there is no natural thing that cannot live a spontaneous, unadorned existence. Perhaps the most complete Cynic defence of man's natural fitness for his environment is Dio Chrysostom's sixth oration ('Diogenes'). Here,

echoing ideas of the classical Sophistic movement, Dio uses Diogenes to argue that human beings are as well adapted to a wild, outdoor existence as any other animal: they do not need clothing, houses, fires and the like, but do better without them. Some argue, falsely, that human beings are unique: they alone walk upright, have no thick skin or warm hair or fur or scales for protection from the elements; they have no natural weapons such as claws or fangs; they are not as strong as lions, or as fast as deer. Dio's treatment is reminiscent of the words of Protagoras when in Plato's dialogue he tells how Epimetheus once distributed talents to the different animals, but, in his absentmindedness, portioned them all out before coming to mankind and so left human beings defenceless. In Protagoras' myth, Prometheus intervened to save mankind with the gifts of fire and cities: technology and humanity's tendency to flock together has enabled it to survive, as well as the further divine gifts of justice and reverence (aidōs).

But, on the contrary, Dio argues in Cynic fashion, man is not at all naturally helpless or weak. To lack thick hair or fur is not to be hopelessly exposed to the elements, for frogs have bare skin like human beings, yet spend the whole year outdoors, most of it in cold water. Or, consider the eye. This is a delicate organ. But it does not need to be wrapped up or protected outdoors. What need then is there to bind up one's feet with shoes? People's feet are tender only because they wear shoes and if they walked about as nature made them, their feet would be tough as leather (D. Chr. 6.15, 6.26–7; cf. ps.-Luc. Cyn. 15). Similarly, people cannot endure heat or cold simply because in the summer they hide in the shade and in the winter they huddle indoors by the fire: such unnatural customs have ruined the species. People should pity themselves less. Frailty is not the human condition but a human choice. Weakness is not due to nature, but only to degenerate customs. Worst and most unnatural of all are the rich, because they are the most dependent on 'civilization' and the customary obedience of others: Dio's Diogenes compares them to newborn babies, for

both need their swaddling clothes (D. Chr. 6.15). The rich, however, are never forced to outgrow theirs and in their folly they forget the beneficent wisdom of nature, which as universal mother provides proper nourishment for all her children: '[N]o creature is born in any region where it cannot live. For otherwise, how could the first human beings have survived, since then there was no fire, houses, clothing, or any other food except what grew wild' (6.28). The first peoples were forced to adapt themselves to the environment, and in this they were only like storks and cranes, who wander on to different regions if ever it becomes too hot or cold (6.32–4; cf. 6.1–4).

This adaptation to the environment or, in the Cynic's language, adaptation to external circumstances, is not an accomplishment that happens immediately. One must train through ponos to recover one's natural self, but when one does return to nature, one returns to an elemental goodness. One recognizes only the present moment as real. What one experiences in the immediacy of the present is 'nature': this sunshine, this shadow, this simple desire, this simple satisfaction. Those who live 'according to nature', in the fullness of the present, will never be disappointed, for there is always enough. Nature provides easily for simple needs and so makes the Cynic supremely happy for she never fails to cater to his elemental desires. In addition, she makes him supremely virtuous. Those who live simply in the present will not act on unnecessary cravings. Rejecting power, honour, wealth and the like as so many delusions, the Cynic has no motive to wage war, murder, enslave, rob, deceive or commit any injustice towards others. He luxuriates in the 'wealth' of owning little, yet his simple 'kingdom' is surrounded (like Crates' Pēra) by a sea of 'wine-dark typhos' at whose storms and ceaseless commotion he looks out with anger, dismay, amusement or pity, depending on his momentary mood. He looks out also on the delusions of the philosophers sailing this way and that, following their stars or atoms or nonexistent

Ideas. None of these live 'according to nature', and so none but the Cynic is truly happy or good."

How do we typify or describe this? I think, and not least because the Cynic imagines it a training that one must pursue as a labour or a struggle, as a "taking responsibility for" oneself in a naturalistic context with the aim of pursuing simplicity. The logic here could be that "nature provides" (not least as that which, of its nature, produces). Indeed, one can see a logic in which "taking responsibility for" and "simplicity" go together. Desmond anthologises on just this subject:

"*the injunction to live in the elemental present is fundamental to ancient Cynicism, and is consequently reflected in a great variety of anecdotes and statements, from early to late. Antisthenes, for instance, claims to satisfy his desires with whatever is present (to paron) (Xen.Symp. 4.38, 4.42). Diogenes tells Alexander to stand out of his sun, compared to which world-conquest, Persian glory and the like are unreal (DL 6.38). The Gymnosophists tell Alexander that he will never possess more than the ground he stands on, except when he dies, when he will occupy a bit more (Arr. Anab. 7.1.5–6). Epictetus (unwittingly) revisits the thought when he writes that the measure of property is the body and what the body can hold: one cannot own anything else. Demetrius of Corinth says that one should live in the moment, because everything is here, and nothing exists elsewhere (Sen. Ben. 7.2.4). Teles' advice is 'to use what is present' (Stob. 3.1.98). Tiresias whispers in the ear of Lucian's Menippus, 'seek out this one single thing before all else: arrange the present well and run along, laughing a lot and taking nothing seriously' (Luc. Nec. 21). The Delphic oracle told Dio to 'do the thing at hand until you come to the ends of the earth' (D. Chr. 13.9). Julian writes that the Cynic satisfies his desires with 'whatever comes to hand' (Or. 7.226b). More abstractly, Oenomaus argues that human knowledge is limited to sense-perception and self-*

consciousness: one knows oneself, and what one sees, hears and touches, but nothing else (Euseb. Praep. evang. 6.7). In keeping with this are anecdotes pitting Diogenes against metaphysical idealists: Diogenes rejects Platonic Ideas (like 'Cupness'), because they cannot be seen (DL 6.53); he refutes Zeno the Eleatic's arguments against motion by walking around. More abstractly still, Antisthenes' denial of predication may, theoretically at least, provide grounding for the ethic of living now, unburdened by needless abstractions of 'past' or 'future', which do not exist now. For, again, Antisthenes seems to have argued that one cannot say 'A is B' but only 'A is A'. If so, then this simple logic could issue forth in a simple epistemology, and an ethic of simplicity: only this 'A' here can be known; only this lived moment is real, and so one should live in accordance with this natural immediacy, concentrate on 'the thing at hand' and dismiss all else as typhos. Thus one might reconstruct the Cynics' general train of thought, and there must be some such line of reasoning. For why else would they adopt as a motto the phrase, 'use the things that are present'? This is the positive complement of the motto of 'defacing the coinage': the Cynic rejects custom, the 'mother-city' of ills, to return to nature, source of virtue, happiness and all goods."

Taking responsibility with an eye on pursuing simplicity now becomes "live in an ever present with what is to hand" – for this is the simplest way to satisfy oneself and live in relative peace. One cannot control chance or fortune in anything like an adequate way so, instead, one should not fixate on it and let things become as they may. Consequently:

"*True pleasure, the Cynics often contend, can only be had by scorning it and by welcoming its opposite, pain. There will always be pain, and so rather than escape it, or try to control uncontrollable fortune, one should grasp the serpent by the neck (Stob. 3.1.98), put out the fire with one's tongue, rush into the fray fearlessly, and fearlessly stare down the barking*

dog (D. Chr. 8.17–19): that is, one should welcome pains as inevitable, love them, or at least accept them as ponoi, preparing one for the pleasures of the satisfaction that will come. Ponos, as both "pain" and "labour", becomes the Cynics' means for maximizing his pleasure. More paradoxically, pain is the cause of pleasure, and the Cynics are a strange breed of ascetic hedonists, or hedonistic ascetics. Or, rather, theirs is the hedonism of nature itself. Pleasure can exist in conjunction with pain."

Or, as Desmond quotes Dio Chrysostom:

"*Ponoi make themselves ever lesser and easier to bear, and make one's pleasures both greater and less harmful whenever they occur with ponoi. But luxury makes pains (ponoi) seem ever harder, and dulls and weakens one's pleasures. For the person who is always luxuriating and never touches ponos will end up unable to endure any pain at all, and also not able to feel any pleasure, not even the most intense. As a result the self-controlled lover of ponos ... lives a life that is far more pleasurable than his opposite.*"

As a consequence, we may round up Desmond's appreciation of the Cynics by noting that he describes a kind of "Cynic primitivism" in which nature is regarded positively and civilisation negatively. In this respect, we may reflect that the earliest people, who lived closest to nature (in fact, so close that they would still be regarded as being it), had the best of it and the most independent and peaceful lives. Since then, however, civilisation, with its customs and laws which are inevitably complicating and troublesome, multipliers of unnecessary misery, has come along and all we can and should do now is train ourselves out of it in an effort to live more in accordance with nature's simplicity instead.

And so, third and finally in this section on the Cynics, I move to discussing Robert Dobbin's appraisal of the Cynics in his anthology of writing by and about Cynics from the Greco-Roman period that is *The Cynic Philosophers: from Diogenes to Julian*. This book is mostly just translations of the ancient texts, many of which have been referenced in passing by Foucault or Desmond above. But Dobbin, as a conscientious scholar, has helpfully provided his précis and interpretation of the Cynics to accompany his anthology of texts in an introduction. It is this I shall excerpt and comment upon in what follows.

The introduction begins by making mention of Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* referring to Diogenes of Sinope as simply "The Dog". This, of course, is a metaphor for Diogenes was not literally a canine. It is enough to point out that this identification was and became a cultural one that would become a commonplace. If talking about "the dog" or "dogs" in Greece and Rome one was likely to be referencing Cynics, Cynicism or Diogenes himself, the preeminent Cynic. And since one can reference all these things simply with such a metaphor then that metaphor must be doing work referencing certain meanings, values and understandings about said people and their ways. It, and they, must be something discursively identifiable in cultural context. Dobbin tells us that "dog" (which is where, in Greek, the word "Cynic" comes from too) was no more a compliment then than it is now and so it must have been "earned" in some regard and felt fitting. But this was not only by those issuing the insult but also by their target(s) too:

"*Diogenes admired the 'honesty' of dogs: they were 'shameless' in demonstrating their obvious fondness or antipathy towards certain people; they survived on very little – though in this they could hardly be less like Diogenes' fellow Athenians, most of whom, it seemed, could never get enough of anything. Most of all Diogenes professed to have, and be ready to share, the secret to that most elusive of blessings, simple contentment. Dogs with their*

buoyant spirits (in the company of their masters, taking part in the hunt, subsisting on only one meal a day with water alone to wash it down) were evidently happy creatures. Why are humans, with our far greater resources, so often not? The solution, in part, was obvious – take a lesson from dogs and other beasts and the simplicity of their existence, and rely on nature to provide a sufficiency of life's essentials. Not that this could be accomplished overnight; through training (askêsis) we first have to cure ourselves of our greedy, pampered habits."

And so we come to "living according to nature" and what that means:

"*Relying on nature, as the Cynics understood it, entailed living almost entirely out of doors (unless spending the night in a wine vat qualifies as an exception), travelling the country with little protection against the elements except a heavy cloak (no tunic or undergarment, no shoes), living off lupins, pulses and other wild cereals, picking mustard to give their plain food flavour, and depending on natural springs to slake their thirst. For rest and relaxation Diogenes enjoyed nothing more than basking in the sun. And the Cynics were great ones for hunting..., never forgetting to cite the importance of the dog (by which, by implication, they drew attention to themselves) when they tired of an exclusively vegetarian diet.*"

Dobbin emphasises that doggish, scavenging identification of the Cynics and, since these people literally came to be known as "dogs", we probably should too. But we must never forget that they do this philosophically which, for the Cynic, means "ethically" – since for the Cynics most of philosophy was simply ethics – "How should we live?" Consequently:

"*All ancient ethical systems identified a telos, a practical goal. Cynics agreed with just about every rival philosophy in claiming that their ethics aimed at, indeed guaranteed,*

happiness (eudaimonia). As a corollary they held that moral virtue was sufficient for happiness. This was not an original view; Socrates had argued for it already. The Cynics, in turn, influenced the Stoics to adopt as the foundation of their own ethics some such correspondence between virtue and happiness. Traditionally, virtue for the Greeks comprised justice, self-control (sôphrosunê) and courage. Plato elevated wisdom to a position of equal, even paramount, importance.

However, this will not do as a description of Cynic ethics. They promoted ideals other than the traditional virtues, qualities that hardly qualify as virtues at all: self-sufficiency, freedom, detachment, training aimed at instilling physical and moral toughness or endurance (karteria). Since no ethical treatise by Diogenes or any of the other early Cynics survives (perhaps because they wrote so few of them), we must try to present a coherent account of their ethical system on our own. The question, then, is what relation obtains between their declared telos, happiness (eudaimonia), the means – virtue – leading to it, 'life in agreement with nature' as a moral principle, and the qualities they prized and promoted such as self-sufficiency (autarkeia), freedom of speech (parrhesia), poverty and the rest. In addition, an obscure incident early in the life of Diogenes of Sinope, its official founder, made 'deface the currency' Cynicism's motto and mission. As generally interpreted, that amounted to what Nietzsche (a professed admirer of the Cynics) would call – and in turn endorse – the 'inversion of all values'. Cynics proposed a new ethics based on reducing material needs in pursuit of self-sufficiency, abetted in part by mental and especially physical training (askêsis). They renounced the pursuit of possessions, fame and power as illusory goods that had no real value in nature...

They championed qualities that were either an affront to traditional Hellenic values (such as active involvement in governing one's native polis), in favour of 'world citizenship', which

amounted to a declaration of independence from any particular city and a profession of allegiance to nature, insofar as nature and the world were one. Even more unconventionally, conditions such as poverty by their reckoning were not misfortunes but paradoxical avenues to peace and contentment – to happiness, in a word."

In other words, what Dobbin is describing is a complete Cynic rethinking of life and existence – but NOT in order to formulate a teaching or propagate a theory (amongst the necessarily educated classes). Rather, it was to instantiate, example and actually live out a new form of living a life. Dobbin in fact highlights that "the Cynics neglect, and very often ridicule, speculative philosophy" and that is because they were not interested in it. They had no need for it. Nature does not ponder and pontificate on the best way to live. It just lives. It lives life as what it is and has that as its singular focus. "Cynics put a premium on the practice of philosophy as opposed to its abstract proof and exposition."

Next Dobbin comes to "key Cynic themes" and they are, with one exception, expositions of ethical virtues. The first is "parrhêsia, or frankness of speech", "a bluntness and nonchalance that border(s) on insolence". Dobbin explains that many philosophers in ancient Greece found themselves a patron who sheltered and provided for them and gave them the opportunity to write and speak at their relative leisure (even if, consequently, they had to take care not to offend their patron and so risk such livelihood as they provided). Not so the Cynic (as Diogenes makes clear in recorded exchanges with Plato who had such a patron) who was a true street philosopher without patron or wealth. Therefore, "Their licence to speak frankly and brazenly derived from the licence of the outsider who, paradoxically, acted as society's conscience" and Cynics often actively "alienated the political powers that be" as a result. Thus, the Cynic spoke with the freedom of the uncoerced outsider.

Next comes *autarkeia*, rendered by Dobbin as both “self-sufficiency” and “independence” and he describes it as “a code of behaviour”. This is a matter of living carefree, without obligation, off the clock, on one’s own recognisance with one’s material concerns limited to what one wished, or was able, to carry with you. Shelter was consequently as one could arrange in the moment. But this would require training (*askêsis*), the next ethical virtue listed, since Cynics had made themselves deliberately homeless and stateless, contrary to their birth state in Greek (or later Roman) civilisation. One had to harden and habituate oneself to the task at hand and break free of civic conveniences/complications. This involved both training in physical fitness and in dealing with comparative austerities (which aren’t really austerities at all when measured against the mass of naturally lived lives in nature which carry on quite naturally and normally without apparent impediment). The human being can live quite simply out in the open just as can any other beast according to the Cynic – who set out to demonstrate it.

Next in Dobbin’s list comes *karteria*, rendered as either “endurance” or “self-control”. Cynics take an example from Greek mythology in this in the figure of Odysseus. Another of their models is the equally famous Heracles. In taking such examples they seem to be appealing to the notion that these Greek figures, immortalised in story and song, embody Cynic yet also Greek qualities which should appeal to Greek culture in general. In other words, they are offering examples of their values and virtues in cultural terms that the general populace might be able to interact with and understand. Given the Cynic stance in regard to the necessity for independence but also the necessity of poverty, regarding it “as a blessing in disguise”, Cynics had need to cultivate a great deal of resistance to public displeasure (and this is not to mention the occasional bout of masturbating or fucking in the street or other similarly outspoken words or deeds about which they felt no shame). Thus, Cynicism was not a way you could take up lightly or inconspicuously. The Cynic

precursor, Antisthenes, remarked “Ignominy should be endured and even welcomed as one more test of one’s mettle” and Cynics took this attitude to heart, cultivating *karteria* as a result.

The final theme is the one that is not a virtue and this is *tuphos*, “vanity” or “self-indulgence” (which actually means a “lack of substance”) and it was applied by the Cynic to the non-Cynic population amongst whom they found themselves:

“*Tuphos was a principal Cynic theme [and] one of their main points of attack. Originally it had the meaning of ‘smoke’ or ‘vapour’. In [the] texts it has the metaphorical meaning of ‘pretence’ or ‘imposture’. The Cynics regarded their contemporaries as a sad race of moral degenerates who valued appearance, prestige and wealth above all else. Tuphos in Diogenes et al. represents preoccupation with luxury and social standing. In this respect, more than any other, they approach the modern connotation attached to the epithet ‘cynical’ – bitter, cutting, pessimistic – about a society that had gained the world but lost its soul.*”

Dobbin next goes through a list of notable Cynics beginning with the pre-Cynic possible teacher of Diogenes, the aforementioned Antisthenes. To be noted here is that no two Cynics are alike and a way of life which extols the virtue of *autarkeia* (independence) should not expect any two Cynics to be alike nor manufacture any demand that they be. Thus, when I (or others) have been talking about what “the Cynics” did or said that “the Cynics” thought this or that it is always simply rhetorical. In reality these were singular men (and at least one woman) who lived in a certain general way but never with any requirement to be exactly the same (albeit we can rhetorically describe similarities of approach and interest). Cynicism was not a club which had a membership card or required

that you signed a declaration of intent which listed rules of behaviour or values one must demonstrate. Rather, as Dobbin says of Diogenes in this section of his introduction, the idea was “to alter received values and replace them”. Or, as the Cynic admirer Nietzsche would later suggest, the “transvaluation of all values”. This certainly involves “making a virtue of necessity and turning misfortune to account” for nature is not something anyone controls (neither, for the Cynic, is it desirable either to control it or to want to control it). Indeed, again as mentioned in Dobbin’s Diogenes profile, the Cynic was not one either equipped, or desirous, of “undertak[ing] organization of a wholly new and radical society”. The Cynic intended to disassemble civilisation and then live in a completely different way, one thought out again from the bottom up. The Cynic was not a tweaker or a tinkerer. The Cynic wanted to annihilate the civilising novelty and go on without it - “With no allowance made for traditional social conventions – for marriage, family, politics, office, civic institutions, coinage or a standing army – his republic amounts to a state of libertarian anarchy.”

As a consequence, as Dobbin mentions of Crates, Cynics often actively discouraged “followers or imitators”. You want to be a Cynic too? Great – but go about it on your own according to your own way of doing things. Cynics were not recruiters, they were not creating a communal movement or a new society – except in the sense that if enough people had taken up their implicit challenge (they didn’t!) then society would have been changed as a consequence anyway. What they were trying to do was undo the society that existed by loitering on street corners or in town squares as a visible conscience of that society denouncing what was going on around them and living... like dogs! Occasionally dogs might find a buddy and hang around together spontaneously (Crates and Hipparchia with their dog-marriage) but they certainly were not bound to stay together in perpetuity or found a community. Nature was the model not the customs of

civilisation like marriage or family obligation or town councils. And in nature things come and go. Often quite literally.

Here a case might be made that the preeminent Cynic is not, in fact, Diogenes but the Hipparchia I began this book with and have mentioned several times since. This is precisely because Hipparchia was a woman – and thus someone far more socially and politically circumscribed than Diogenes or any other man in Greek or Roman society. Hipparchia was seemingly a complete novelty. As Dobbin writes:

"*There was no precedent for a woman's wholesale commitment to philosophy and no parallel for another six centuries at least, until we come across the female Neoplatonist philosopher Hypatia. That she chose Cynicism is especially surprising, considering that it took its inspiration from Heracles and seemed less congenial to females of the species than any other ethical regime.*"

Hipparchia must clearly have been a remarkable woman:

"*She adopted the Cynic dress as well as the provocative behaviour that the mantle, satchel and staff signalled to strangers even at a distance. Greek women were circumscribed by any number of social rules and restrictions: Hipparchia openly defied them. She excited protest of a kind Cynics generally provoked, but more in her case since she was a woman. The appearance of women in public, unattended by relatives or a husband, was frowned upon in classical Greece; but Hipparchia associated with her Cynic peers in doing it all the time. She accompanied her husband, Crates, to symposia and dinner parties, normally the preserve of men; and on such occasions she dared to challenge the male guests to contests of rational argument on equal terms.*"

Hipparchia highlights, in the most extreme way possible, that Cynics were, first and foremost, cultural critics. Another who does so is Dio Chrysostom who, writing of his time as an active Cynic in the first century, says:

"*People who met me judged from my appearance that I was either a vagrant, a beggar – or a philosopher. In time, without any conscious effort on my part, I became known as a philosopher … And indeed, I profited from this designation, because many people consulted me on questions of good and bad; so that I was forced to reflect on those topics … My reflections led me to conclude that practically everyone was devoid of sense … that all were subject to the same distractions – money, reputation, physical pleasure – and that none knew how to escape them and free his soul …*"

There the concern expressed is clearly personal but no less societal – otherwise why the concern with what everyone else is like? Note here that the issue is a kind of rationality which civilised living is imagined to lack and so the claim of Cynics to be offering a better rationality however it might appear on the face of it.

Dobbin concludes with words on Cynicism's "legacy". Primarily this is through the later and more popular Stoics who developed on Cynic ethics to produce their own. Both, according to Dobbin and Diogenes Laertius, the anthologiser of Greek and Roman philosophy, were "in agreement that virtue is man's goal". Zeno of Citium, Stoicism's founder, is argued to have in some senses "written on the tail of the dog" in a way that leads some to conjecture he was in some sense a disciple of Diogenes of Sinope. It was also a Stoic who designated Cynicism the "shortcut to virtue" arguing, in tandem with the Cynic, that "we should look to the beasts and infer from their behaviour". Dobbin then adds that:

"*Identifying the telos as 'life in agreement with nature' is tantamount to saying that it is the key to happiness (eudaimonia). But attaining lasting happiness requires mental and physical training that enable a person – happily – to endure life's adverse circumstances. This training (askêsis) conduces to bravery, self-control and justice. Happiness entails possession of these virtues, and renders a person wise and free. External goods commonly considered necessary for happiness, such as wealth, fame and political power, have no natural value.*"

Dobbin suggests that Cynics and Stoics held these views in common, describing them as the shortcut to virtue (if one could contemplate the absolute break with civilised normality they would entail) "because it entailed a radical break with family, property, social comforts and social conventions – obviously not a project most people would contemplate, much less complete." But if you want a more ancient appraisal of the idea of Cynicism in a more native setting then look no further than these (probably invented) words of what is likely a pseudo-Lucian (which are used by Dobbin as an introduction to Cynicism in ancient texts) in a dialogue in which a Cynic, identified in the dialogue only as "the Cynic", is interrogated by one Lycinus in relation to his views in a dialogue intended to showcase the relative positions. Here the Cynic speaks:

"*God is that gracious host who provides many dishes of various kinds, so that his guests can have whatever suits them – the healthy, the sick, the strong, and the infirm. We are not supposed to eat all of them indiscriminately; each should take what is set in front of him and of that only as much as he really needs. [8] You resemble the guest who, in his greed and gluttony, helps himself to everything – and not just what's easy of access from local land and water. You import your pleasures from the ends of the earth, always prizing what's exotic over what's regional, what's expensive over what's cheap, what's hard to get over what's near to hand. In short, instead of a simple life you choose to fill it with unnecessary*

complication. Because all this expensive stuff which is supposedly so conducive to happiness and which you hold so dear costs a lot in terms of pain and aggravation. Just look at gold, which is so sought after, or silver, or expensive houses, fancy clothes, and all that goes with them. Then consider at what price they're acquired in terms of trouble, pain and danger – or rather in terms of blood, death and shattered lives, not just because many people die at sea searching for these luxury goods or ruin their health manufacturing them, but because they are the source of so much intrigue and conflict among you, setting friend against friend, child against parent, even wife against husband.

[9] And these calamities all occur despite the fact that bright colours do nothing to make clothes warmer, gilded roofs afford no better shelter, drink tastes no more appetizing for being served in gold or silver cups, nor is sleep sweeter when taken in ivory beds. In fact, you will often find that people of status cannot get any rest in their ivory beds, wrapped in their expensive blankets. I need hardly tell you that rich and spicy foods are no more nourishing but can actually harm our bodies and induce disease. [10] Why add the things we do and suffer for the sake of sex? Yet how easy it is to allay this passion, unless we are addicted to perversions. Nor is it enough for us to show ourselves mad and dissolute in the pursuit of sex, nowadays we twist everything from its natural use – like people who would treat a coach not as a coach but a carriage...

[15] My prayer is that my feet be just like hooves, as Chiron's were said to be; that I need bedclothes no more than do lions, expensive food no more than dogs. Let the whole world be bed large enough for me, let me call the universe my home; and may I always prefer the food that's easiest to acquire. May I never need gold or silver; and I wish the same for my friends, since greed for money is the source of society's wars, plots, murders and divisions. And behind it is the unceasing lust for more. So let such desires keep their distance. I hope

never to hanker after more than others, but instead be granted the capacity to do with less."

Earlier on in this chapter I asked a couple of questions which I put like this:

"*My problematic, taking all this onboard, is this: what if, as I have said, 'the wild', nature, is a place of no narrative, something beyond interpretation in the metaphysical or totalising ways humans try to take it? What if it is epistemologically unverifiable, slippery, ever-changing? What if, in a way we might describe as queer, it resists classification, functions in an outlaw way outside it? How might we live in a wild that cannot be tamed, that does not submit to anyone's overarching story, that has no story to tell of its own and, in fact, ANNIHILATES all stories?*

There can be a supplementary question to this: Nature for a human being, in a pragmatic sense, is an intellectual appreciation of surroundings made, one imagines, for survival purposes. One needs to know where and how one is at any given time and consequently makes (hopefully informed) assumptions accordingly. 'Nature' is, thus, a function of humanity (from our perspective). Could we live at all without it being this?"

The issue here in question one is that nature escapes our control. It is spontaneous, it refuses to obey, it is following multiplicitous desires of its own. That, I would suggest, is actually its function and desirable. It is the consequence of things not being us, our powers being conditional and limited, the agency of other beings and forces, etc. It is realities like this which constitute the world we live in. That world has come to be by itself

by lots of things interacting freely, transforming, on their own recognisance or in their own, self-determined ways, and I would not much wish to disturb such a process or its reality for this is the productive and multivarious chaos of things and differences which creates an order. Human narratives, given these facts, are then attempts to control this seeming chaos (and limit the difference and transformation) by means of imaginative rational schemes and these are a consequence of what we became as beings who live within this chaotic order. But we are still becoming ourselves (for this process is continuous and never actually stops) and who knows what else we can or shall become? This implicates question two which basically says that human beings must take a view on nature (not least by inventing it as a unified idea it is not empirically – which is to say "the unity of nature and nature as a unity" is itself imagined as a thing) as something in relation to themselves in order that they may live reliably within it. (So far, so unsurprising. What that is alive does not need a relative ability to sense and interact with its surroundings?) That is wrapped up in things humans call "understanding", "making sense", "explanation" and other suchlike rationally imagined behaviours they have imagined they needed and that served felt useful purposes as a result.

My argument is then that what I have written about Postanarchism and Cynicism in this chapter supplies an answer to these questions, one that can be summed up as "autonomy". This answer recognises the claims of nihilism in regard to the questions I have asked above at the head of the chapter and so the problem of societies that impose narrative understandings on reality in an attempt to artificially constrain it (and its spontaneous, disobedient, multivarious desires of its own) for their own purposes (giving meaning to the void). As a consequence, I am not saying that "autonomy" is yet another narrative nor something a narrative justifies or results in. I am saying that autonomy is a self-actualising ethic (perhaps even a "technique") and thus a way of behaving in the void

that is our coexistence. I am saying that “autonomy” is a strategy for avoiding the narrative nets that other humans will try to ensnare us with in order to trap us in said narratives. If the wild is billions of things just being what they are as if by biological imperative (and they may or may not be; it is the use of the idea that interests me) then I am saying that it is in our interest, personal and collective, to be this too, to become the spontaneous, disobedient and desiring things that make up “the wild” so understood (= queer).

To explain this further I need to sidetrack, briefly, into philosophy of language. Consider the following thesis (which is entirely my own as the result of the intellectual influences I have had): “The Magical Theory of Language, or, What We Are Doing With Words”.

What is “the magical theory of language”? Well, in a nutshell, it is the idea that language itself, as a skill or facility, is the ability to manipulate concepts in conceptual space for the purpose of organising the experience of certain intelligent living beings in a material reality. The pertinent example here is that of a magician (which is why it is called a magical theory) for what a (performative) magician does is use language to manipulate an audience into believing that something impossible has happened when, in reality, it hasn’t. It is noteworthy here, for the purposes of the theory, that something has in fact happened (the magician has done something) but the “trick” works inasmuch as the magician uses words in order to organise how the audience thinks about what they have witnessed. (Language as directive in a context in which just about anything could be imagined in multiple ways.) It is the thinking (articulated in and through linguistic concepts) which activates the trick. The rabbit WAS pulled out of the hat. The person WAS sawn in half. The assistant DID disappear. The spell DID cause subsequent events to occur in a certain way or to a certain outcome. What is happening here is that language

(including its conditions and the beliefs and values and meanings that can be inculcated through it) is being used to organise human experience into certain understandings, explanations or narratives of sense. And so we get the notion, expressed, for example, by the magician and writer Alan Moore, that “magic” is really just facility with language and that, for example, a “grimoire” is really just a grammar, an organisation of words where “words” fundamentally have the power to shape reality.

Magic, of course, is often a performance and so is often also used for entertainment. But this theory bites much harder than being just for show because the argument here is that this is how language always or normally works and not just on stages or the TV. The theory, in other words, is one about language in general, one which says that, in developing language, human beings have found a way to manipulate their experience (or simply experiences) of the material reality they inhabit by conceptual means for felt or imagined benefit and prosperance. This, in turn, has nothing to do with language being either representative of material realities or correspondent to them (“realities” being themselves imagined as well). The theory says only that language is a conceptual tool for manipulating experience by means of conceptual space with felt or imagined benefit – and that that is all you need for this theory of language to work. All you need to be able to do is to linguistically conceptualise and manipulate experience in such a way as benefit or profit is imagined or felt from the subsequent experience of doing so.

So nothing about this theory involves “getting reality right” (something which becomes formally unnecessary and the possibility of which is never even addressed) because all you actually need with language is to use it with profit, to find that it is functional in a way you have desired. It is true to say that this requires some measure of reliability and consistency in order to function usefully but I agree with those who would say that such a

facility is simply and normally consequent upon using language anyway. In other words, most language “makes sense” (as it is called) because language is mostly used in order to make sense in terms of its function in the first place and the customs and procedures for adjudicating this are inherent within languages themselves in order for them to function as languages. (A language user can distinguish a sentence or utterance meant to make some sense from gibberish or nonsense. That is simply part and parcel of being an experienced language user.) In other words, language use is concurrent with the language used being sensible enough to convey a consistent, communicable and so shareable experience of the world that is imagined to come with some profit.

This theory of language then holds to the view that language is vital for anything and everything a human being can imagine, think or feel (i.e. these things simply are a matter of language constitutively) since they are linguistically formulated and articulating beings. How you can imagine, think or feel is consequent on your linguistic facility and ability. This is not simply universal to the human species (and, who knows, to other species too in their own appropriate ways) but cultural in its manifestation and languages are cultures which articulate experience of the world culturally. It is, consequently, entirely possible that one culture, for example, may not be able to imagine an experience of the world in the way that another one does because its culturally mediated language does not allow it to. (The Inuit have x amount of words for snow, etc., which gives a uniquely nuanced concept and use of snowy experience.) This, in turn, can lead to completely different forms of life. It can lead to similar activities, for example sex, being understood in completely different ways from culture to culture. This fact itself, I would argue, suggests the magical theory of language as a motivation for language as a phenomenon at all for it answers the question “Why does language exist?” with the answer “In order that certain kinds of intelligent beings can create a sensible environment for themselves out of the flux of a

universe of becoming that they do not control". This view of language, that it was a pragmatic attempt to make sensible what, without language, is merely a world of unexpurgated sensation in need of interpretive interaction, was that one articulated by Friedrich Nietzsche in his unpublished 1873 essay "On Truth and Lying in A Non-Moral Sense". It is the view that what some think innate is merely just contingent, a "way of dealing with", and this view was taken up by many consciously post-Nietzschean thinkers such as Foucault or Deleuze or Rorty in their different ways. All of Foucault's "histories of thought" rely on this basic premise, for example, with the consequence that if we imagined or thought differently, something which is always entirely possible as a potentiality, we would act differently and would consequently live in a different world.

But what does this mean practically? What is the "cash value" of the idea? Primarily that reality is created, interdependently (i.e. socially and individually at the same time in an interactive way), and has the nature of a constantly transforming interpretation. (The ability to "update" is built into language.) "Right" and "wrong" or "true" and "false" in relation to this are functions of language (what it is and what it is for, part of its functioning) rather than imagined objective valuations about a world external to language about which it is reporting in a corresponding way according to a criterion of accuracy. On this theory, language is not reporting anything (and so correspondence is neither necessary nor important) because "reporting" is not its function. Its function is manipulation of experience in order to create coherent (usually narrative) understandings by which language users can articulate themselves in the material world of experience. More personally, we may then say that how anyone imagines, thinks or feels is how they are creating the world they live in and that, if they did so differently, then they would be living in a different world. This takes us back to the magician who uses language to lull the audience into thinking that X has happened for the purpose of their trick. *It is to say that*

language is the imaginative creation of contexts by which linguistic beings set themselves in environments in a pragmatic way. Or, in other words, that language itself is a "trick".

So why do you then think that rich men in America, for example, own media companies?
Elon Musk: X (formerly Twitter)
Larry and David Ellison (Oracle): Paramount, CBS, (TikTok and CNN to follow as I write?)
Jeff Bezos (Amazon): Washington Post, Twitch
Mark Zuckerberg (Meta): Facebook, Instagram, Threads, Whatsapp
Rupert Murdoch: Fox News, newspapers in the USA, UK and Australia

If the use of language shapes EVERYBODY'S world because language is a world-shaping tool that conjures realities then who you listen to matters, what you think matters, and what you can or are induced to imagine matters.

In fact, this actually makes language THE route to prison or to freedom, to incarcerated or autonomous living. And whether you live in prison or in freedom may depend on how willing or able you are to rethink and reimagine who and where you are in relation to everything and everyone else. When Martin Heidegger said that "Language is the house of being" it turns out he could not have been saying anything more consequential for human beings at all.

Now what has this got to do with what I have been saying and why do I bring it up? I bring it up as a way of bringing "the wild" and "human beings" into relationship. This might sound stupid because surely one is unavoidably a part of the other? This is true but one can still (and, according to my second question above, conceivably must) imagine configurations which conceptualise the relationship imaginatively. Some, for example,

imagine that human beings are, or should be, the masters of the wild. Both, however, are conjuring realities and then acting in accordance with them – and that's where the magical theory of language comes in to help explain what is going on. My argument here is that the wild, nature, is that which acts as what it is (which may not always be linguistically capturable) and, by doing so, deconstructs said narratives (which it operates of independently, having no obligation to obey) which can never completely, and always only contingently, make attempts to grasp, control or constrain it linguistically and conceptually. The wild, then, is a constant or forever beyond language and that which must constantly and consistently evade its containment. In this respect, Saul Newman's configuration of the postanarchist approach to power – as something which constantly seeks to evade or ignore or fail to recognise it – is a similar strategy (where, in nature of course, this is not a "strategy" at all but simply the way the chaotic order of the wild develops as a human observation in participation). The wild, then, is beyond language, beyond concepts, beyond narrative – and there is something we can learn from that.

What we learn is a technique or ethic for living called "autonomy" and something I realised in writing the chapter above was how so many of the significant people and their ideas I have discussed under the general rubric of "anarchy" over the last ten years have actually been variations both on similar themes and on autonomy specifically. Consider, for example, the Cynics, Golden Age pirates, Max Stirner and Friedrich Nietzsche, Emma Goldman and Postanarchism, all of them major influences on how I have come to understand anarchy and those without whom the picture I have constructed could not exist. All of these focus on various configurations of autonomy as ethical practices or techniques of freedom or both. All of them want to "change the currency" of the "civilised" situations they find themselves in. All of them think that, if you would live differently, then you have to think differently (conjure up a new reality) and then, of your

own volition, live according to it as a means to a voluntary inservitude based on human singularity. Take, for example, Nietzsche as found in section 203 of *Beyond Good and Evil*:

"*We, who have a different faith – we, to whom the democratic movement is not merely a form assumed by political organization in decay but also a form assumed by man in decay, that is to say in diminishment, in process of becoming mediocre and losing his value: whither must we direct our hopes? – Towards new philosophers, we have no other choice; towards spirits strong and original enough to make a start on antithetical evaluations and to revalue and reverse 'eternal values'; towards heralds and forerunners, towards men of the future who in the present knot together the constraint which compels the will of millennia on to new paths. To teach man the future of man as his will, as dependent on a human will, and to prepare for great enterprises and collective experiments in discipline and breeding so as to make an end of that gruesome dominion of chance and nonsense that has hitherto been called 'history' – the nonsense of the 'greatest number' is only its latest form – : for that a new kind of philosopher and commander will some time be needed, in face of whom whatever has existed on earth of hidden, dreadful and benevolent spirits may well look pale and dwarfed. It is the image of such leaders which hovers before our eyes – may I say that aloud, you free spirits? The circumstances one would have in part to create, in part to employ, to bring them into existence; the conjectural paths and tests by virtue of which a soul could grow to such height and power it would feel compelled to these tasks;* ***a revaluation of values*** *under whose novel pressure and hammer a conscience would be steeled, a heart transformed to brass, so that it might endure the weight of such a responsibility; on the other hand, the need for such leaders, the terrible danger they might not appear or might fail or might degenerate – these are our proper cares and concerns, do you know that, you free spirits? These are the heavy, remote thoughts and thunder clouds that pass across our life's sky.*" (emphasis mine)

Nietzsche talks here (after a past book, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which is soaked in language which describes a future race who are value creators and – necessarily – value destroyers) about a necessary "revaluation of values" which most obviously derives from the Cynic one (which Nietzsche is very interested in to the extent some call him a "Neo-Cynic") but which just as obviously influences the one Emma Goldman will later call for in her own writing and rhetoric (for example, in her "My Disillusionment in Russia" period). Max Stirner, too, and not least as a major influence on Saul Newman's postanarchist thinking, wanted to destroy old values (indeed, old powers such as the state, god and humanistic morality) and create new ones based in the "creative nothing" of the Unique (ones such as "ownness"). Pirates were quite obviously those who eschewed civilised society in order to set up their own according to their own, autonomously agreed, articles. All of these people are currency defacers and currency changers. They remake values and understand that, to live differently, you must think differently and reconfigure relations in newly imagined realities which actually look different in their manifestation. As such, they prioritise:

1. Autonomy
2. A refusal of the State (or similar institutional control)
3. Independence
4. Acting from and with direct action
5. A wild and spontaneous, rather than civilised and customary, ethics
6. Responsibility for yourself and your life
7. A reality of no permanently fixed arrangements
8. The necessity of rethinking and transformation to life

None of this is primarily about “making (a) sense” or the primacy of (constructing) a narrative as it can be for the dogmatic civilisers. (As we saw when discussing the Cynics, civilisation has a habit of becoming something run on the basis of self-supporting customs, values and beliefs regardless of their consequences or effects through time.) It is true to say that it is an imagined necessary “seeing differently” and the argument here is not that “the autonomous position” somehow swings free of its own fictions. As philosophers like Richard Rorty have argued in the past, it is not clear that the human beings we have become can ever do this and that is partly the import of my “magical theory” of language. But the focus for the autonomous is actually the autonomy itself – and maintaining it – in the face of all circumstances as a technique for living. So in that sense it is not even about producing definitive outcomes or having goals: for the autonomy is the point. As Saul Newman configures this in postanarchist terms: you start from autonomy rather than aiming for it at the end of a process. You take the autonomy you already have at the level of a singular living being and make it your means of existence. For the Cynic their autarkeia is the point and the shamelessness, self-controlled endurance and bold speech develop accordingly as aspects of this in order to live the spontaneous, disobedient (in the sense “not controlled”) and desiring life of the wild. We can sum all this up, in fact, with Stirner’s term “ownness”. If we all cultivate an ethic or technique of ownness we shall find we develop into autonomous beings quite organically and shall come to live and define new relations before which authoritarian and dogmatic conceptions of the same cannot stand.

“Ownness”, as a form of autonomy (autarkeia) , shall be our politics of everyday life.

5. Abdullah Öcalan and the Misunderstanding of Anarchy

Abdullah Öcalan is a co-founder of the Kurdistan Workers' Party otherwise known as the PKK (the PKK is designated as a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the United States, the European Union, the UK, Australia, and Japan) which engaged in a violent insurgency and guerrilla actions against the Turkish state in the latter part of the twentieth century and the early part of this one in the cause of both revolutionary socialism of a Marxist-Leninist variety and a desire for Kurdish nationalism which would result in a Kurdish state. (These aims were changed in 2005 as described below. People of Kurdish ethnicity exist in no one current country on the geopolitical map, straddling what is currently regarded as Turkish, Iraqi, Iranian and Syrian territory instead.) Kurds have been an oppressed people in Turkish territory over the course of the PKK's existence and the Kurdish language, for example, was banned in public and private in Turkey after the military coup of 1980. Öcalan himself, although born inside Turkish borders, was based in Syria (which gave the PKK safe haven) from 1979-1998. But in 1998 safe haven was revoked and Öcalan had to flee, bouncing from country to country in the process. This led to him being captured by a Turkish intelligence and security agency the following year (with the help of the American CIA) and his rendition to Turkey where he has remained imprisoned ever since. In prison he has often been subject to years of solitary confinement and/or denial of access to his lawyers. Öcalan was originally sentenced to death by the Turkish legal process he was submitted to but this was later commuted to life imprisonment when Turkey abandoned the death penalty altogether in the early 2000s.

Abdullah Öcalan is evidently a man of considerable intellect and has written numerous books of political history, criticism and activism. He began, much like the man he took for his modern teacher (calling himself his student), Murray Bookchin, as a Marxist-Leninist and this informed much of his early activism and his work in setting up and operating the PKK. Over time, however, both before he was imprisoned and since, he became more aligned with the teaching of Bookchin, looked for more political solutions to problems, and began to speak of an ecological “democratic confederalism” which, notably, also included commitments to women’s rights and, indeed, their social and political equality. (He has in the past stated that “a country can't be free unless the women are free" and he holds to a form of feminism known as “Jineology”. In Kurdish “Jin” = “woman”.) It is this thinking, variously published, often in quite lengthy tomes, which is a major influence on that current political entity in north-eastern Syria known as “The Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES)” which is often popularly known in radical or Kurdish circles as simply “Rojava” or otherwise as Syrian Kurdistan. This is a self-declared autonomous enclave of mostly Kurds who have close affinity with the sort of ideas Öcalan has latterly propagated, themselves being influenced by Bookchin’s ideas of social ecology and municipalism. The PKK and others moved in this direction too, following Öcalan’s lead, slowly relieving themselves of their former Marxist-Leninist and strictly nationalist ideas, as well as their violence, in favour of political solutions.

Whilst in Turkish prison in the 21st century Öcalan (who is now about 76 years old as of 2025) has authored a five part series of books (published between 2015 and 2022) under the heading “Manifesto for/of a Democratic Civilisation”. The series aims to argue for the democratic confederalism that Rojava are attempting to live on the ground as a workable political arrangement of relationships (so far for around 13 or 14 years) whilst also setting out the political philosophy of democratic confederalism in the context of civilisational

political history, capitalism, misogyny and the modern world. (Obviously the author has an especial focus on the Middle East specifically within that as well.) It is in the third of these books (remembering both Öcalan's Marxist-Leninist political heritage and his more recent advocacy for the social ecology of Bookchin which has its own broadly communist heritage), titled *The Sociology of Freedom*, that Öcalan, who is attempting both a critique of modernity and civilisation as he understands them, lays out a "reevaluation" of anarchism (again, as he interprets it). This is in a chapter in which he explains his metaphilosophical point in the following way:

"*The substance of my criticism is that the five-thousand-year-old civilization system (including the even older hierarchical system) stems from the accumulation of capital and the power established over the agrarian-village society and nomadic communities in the rural areas and the craftsmen and slave laborers in the cities. This reality has remained essentially unchanged until the present; these power and the state monopolies, which have taken various forms, including trade, money, and industry, have remained unchanged. The history of civilization is based on both the wars between monopolies over their respective shares and the wars they wage together against opposing forces. Beyond that are the wars of ideological hegemony and the games and contrivances for the usurpation of social value by war and through power. The period of capitalist civilization—i.e., modernity—is this system at its most advanced. The center-periphery, hegemony-competition, and ups and downs of crises characteristic of this system were there from the beginning. The period of modernity, on the other hand, in particular at a time when financial capital plays a hegemonic role, denotes the most profound structural crisis.*

I suggest that the alternative solution be sought in the consciousness and movements of the social nature of all of the forces that have positioned themselves in dialectical opposition to

the forces connected to the rise of hierarchy, the various periods of civilization, and the history of modernism marked by capitalism. No version of official civilization history offers any solution for these oppositional forces. If social struggles have not succeeded in putting their utopias of equality and freedom into practice, this is primarily because they have used the same weapons (power and the state) as the unraveling civilization and envisaged the future they want to build as little more than a different version of this civilization. The inability to create a distinct mentality and the structures suitable to their own social natures has caused them to dissolve into versions of their opposite pole."

It is then in the remaining part of the chapter containing this text (chapter 9) that Öcalan details some thoughts on various of the "forces that have positioned themselves in dialectical opposition to the forces connected to the rise of hierarchy, etc." such as "Real Socialism" (i.e. Marxism or Marxism-Leninism), Anarchism, Feminism, Ecology and various other "cultural movements". These are to clarify, for his general argument, how their approaches help or hinder or how, in his analysis, they got things right or wrong. It is his remarks on anarchism, which are not very long, that I first want to quote before I then use them as the basis for my own discussion of anarchy and how it should be understood:

"*Reevaluating Anarchism. Anarchist movements that have their roots in the French Revolution and appeared at the same time as real socialism deserve to be reevaluated in the wake of the dissolution of real socialism, or, rather, its integration into the system. It is better understood today that the criticism made by anarchism's famous representatives, including Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, and Pyotr Kropotkin, against both the system and real socialism were not entirely unjustified. As a movement that criticizes capitalism not only as a private and state monopoly but also as modernity, they stand out by taking their place at the opposite end of the system. The anarchist critique of power,*

both from moral and political perspectives, was accurate to a significant degree, but the effects of social structures they came from are evident in their movement. The class reactions of the aristocratic sections that had been removed from power by capitalism and city artisans, who found themselves far worse off than they had been, projected this reality. The fact that anarchists have been unable to develop a strong base, have remained individuals, and were unable to develop an opposing system is closely linked to their social structures. They understand very well what capitalism is doing, but they do not have a very clear idea of what they need to do. To summarize their views:

a) They criticize the capitalist system from the extreme left. They understand better that this system dismantles moral and political society, and, unlike Marxists, they do not attribute a progressive role to capitalism. Their approach to the societies that have been dismantled by capitalism is more positive. They do not see such societies as reactionary and doomed to decay but instead consider their survival moral and political.

b) Anarchism's approach to power and the state is much more comprehensive and realistic than that of the Marxists. Bakunin, for example, argues that power is absolute evil. But the demand that power and the state be abolished immediately and at all costs is utopian and does not have much of a chance of being realized. Anarchists were, however, able to foresee that you can't use power and the state to build socialism, and that if you did you would perhaps end up with an even more dangerous bureaucratic capitalism.

c) The prediction that building a centralized nation-state would be a disaster for all of the working-class and popular movements and a major blow to their hopes proved realistic. The anarchists were also quite right in their criticism of the Marxists in relation to German and Italian unity. They have also asserted that the development of history in favor of the nation-

state was a huge loss for any utopian vision of equality and freedom, and they strongly criticized the Marxists' pro-nation-state stance, accusing them of treason. The anarchists, for their part, argued for confederalism.

d) Anarchist views and criticisms of bureaucratization, industrialism, and urbanization have also been largely confirmed and played an important role in the anarchist movement developing an anti-fascist and ecological attitude early on.

e) The anarchist critique of real socialism has been confirmed by the dissolution of the real socialist system. Anarchists were best at identifying the fact that what had been established was not socialism but bureaucratic state capitalism.

Despite these important and confirmed views and criticisms, the fact that the anarchist movement has failed to become a mass movement like real socialism and has never had the chance to implement its idea is worthy of reflection. I believe that this is due to a serious deficiency and flaw in anarchist theory related to the weakness of its analysis of civilization and an inability to develop an implementable system. They have neither developed a suitable analysis of historical-society nor proposed any solutions.

Moreover, they too have been influenced by positivist philosophy, and it would be wrong to suggest that they have overcome the Eurocentric social sciences. Their most important flaw, however, is that they lack systematic thought about democratic politics and modernity and the related structures. The rigor they showed in developing correct views and criticisms was, unfortunately, not replicated in systematizing and implementing their ideas. It was perhaps their class backgrounds that hampered this. Another important obstacle was their opposition to any type of authority, both theoretically and in their day to

day lives. They displaced their rightful reaction to power and state authority onto all forms of authority and order. This affected their ability to develop democratic modernity theoretically and in practice. I believe that the most important point for anarchist self-criticism would be the inability to see the legitimacy of democratic authority and the need for democratic modernity. In addition, the fact that they have been unable to develop the option of democratic nation in place of nation-state is an important deficiency that also deserves some self-critical reflection.

The dissolution of real socialism, the development of ecological and feminist movements, and a general surge in civil society sentiment have no doubt had a positive impact on anarchists. But sitting around talking about having been right is pointless. The question they need to answer is why they were unable to develop or build an ambitious system that reflected their goals, a question that draws attention to the chasm between their theory and their lives. Have they really overcome the modern life they criticize so much? More precisely, how consistent are they in this regard? Can they leave behind a Eurocentric way of life and truly step into global democratic modernity?

It is possible to multiply similar questions and criticisms. What is important, however, is that this movement, which has made huge sacrifices, has important thinkers, whose views and criticisms are respected within the intellectual community, and a legacy that can be brought together in a consistent system that is open to development and opposed to the existing system. Anarchists are more likely to engage in practice informed by self-criticism than are real socialists. Taking their rightful place within economic, social, political, intellectual, and ethical struggles could prove significant. It is possible for anarchists to both renew themselves and make a strong contribution to the struggles that have hastened

in the Middle East and whose dimensions of culture and civilization have become more prominent. They are an important ally in the rebuilding of democratic modernity."

The first thing to say about these remarks is that they clearly come from a deeply socialist political place. A socialist outlook and a socialist ideology to measure political ideas by is replicated all throughout the language used (as well as Öcalan's broader theory of democratic confederalism). Secondarily, we can of course mightily see the influence of Murray Bookchin's social ecology upon Öcalan as well. I will have cause to delve into this in more detail shortly. We can note, however, that when Öcalan brings up anarchism the only anarchists he actually references by name are "Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, and Pyotr Kropotkin". Is it to be understood that these figures are to be the stand-ins for the whole of the anarchist thought world across almost two centuries and multiple continents in all its vast diversity? Are they perhaps imagined as canonical figures whom all anarchists are meant to assimilate or recognise? If so, I imagine this to be Öcalan's first misstep for anarchy (my preferred term over anarchism) knows no such figures (unlike Marxism or Leninism, for example, which are ideologies expressly named after individual figures whom they revere – compare also Maoism. But there absolutely is *no such thing* as Proudhonism, Bakuninism or Kropotkinism and in anarchy there expressly never could or should be. This is a key point, and a key point of difference, between anarchy and varieties of socialism). It is worth noting here that when Bookchin spoke about what he regarded as an authentic version of anarchism in *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism* (SALA) he also referenced primarily Bakunin and Kropotkin (they were at least minimally socialist in what Bookchin imagined to be a necessary way) with Proudhon ultimately being regarded as too individualistic and not programmatic enough.

It is certainly fair to say, on the other hand, that Öcalan doesn't bring anarchism up merely to denigrate it (as Bookchin did several times in his later years). He ends his "reevaluation" by recommending anarchists (ones like Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin?) as allies of value that can be worked with and that is after several occasions in which he praises their foresight. (Whether this is the foresight of Proudhonian-Bakuninite-Kropotkinists or anarchists more generally is hard to tell. Öcalan perhaps does not seem to have understood that anarchists, like cats, refuse to be herded as easily – and that this is an express emphasis of their politics.) He regards anarchists as "from the extreme left" (which I find puzzling and simplistic in equal measure if only because there is no anarchist collective imperative and anarchy itself would seem to eschew authoritative political verities of any kind) yet he can praise, for example, that "Anarchists were... able to foresee that you can't use power and the state to build socialism" or that "building a centralized nation-state would be a disaster for all of the working-class and popular movements and a major blow to their hopes" or that "Anarchist views and criticisms of bureaucratization, industrialism, and urbanization have... been largely confirmed and played an important role in the anarchist movement developing an anti-fascist and ecological attitude early on". Fundamentally, Öcalan credits anarchists with seeing that what had been established through more programmatic forms of socialism connected to inspirational figures "was not socialism but bureaucratic state capitalism" and that "the development of history in favor of the nation-state was a huge loss for any utopian vision of equality and freedom". On this, we can probably agree.

But when we come to the criticisms of anarchism this starts to change very quickly. There is probably not that much to argue about when Öcalan observes that "the demand that power and the state be abolished immediately and at all costs is utopian and does not have much of a chance of being realized". It is indeed completely unreasonable to imagine

that this could, let alone should, be the case. But is this the anarchist demand? (It should, of course, be known by people with any sort of anarchist education that it was the rallying call of past figures such as Kropotkin that people in general take over their "factories, fields and workshops" and begin running them according to different, more collective, values thus ushering in an anarchist-communist dispensation.) Most recently, in an earlier chapter of this book, I discussed (once again) the postanarchy of Saul Newman which, for example, diverted from the more ancient anarchist notion of immediate political revolution (or even social revolution) and a new political dispensation which subsumed all the previous dispensation had, in turn, subsumed before it. In that discussion the idea of a new social and political narrative which was imposed on society in general (becoming its metanarrative) was distinctly poo-pooed in a way that the more socialist Öcalan would entirely disagree with. In fact, in his analysis of anarchism he has seemingly just gone ahead and assumed that anarchism is a form of, or divergence from, socialism which still retains socialist aims and roots in all their programmatic collectivity. In some cases (such as those he names in and through past anarchist figures) he would be right. But in others, and in its continuing development throughout the 20th century and into the 21st, he would be dead wrong.

Indeed, Öcalan's major complaint seems very familiar if it is described as "The fact that anarchists have been unable to develop a strong base, have remained individuals, and were unable to develop an opposing system... closely linked to their social structures" or in the desire that anarchists develop "a legacy that can be brought together in a consistent system". BUT ANARCHY IS NOT ABOUT CREATING "A CONSISTENT SYSTEM". Of course, if Öcalan realised this he would probably have more cause to dislike it according to his own socialist values. Even as it is, however, he claims that anarchists "do not have a very clear idea of what they need to do." I would suggest, on the contrary, that

they do often have a very clear idea of “what they need to do” and specifically of the fact that “what they need to do” is a matter for them rather than programmes, systems or social dogmas.

In his reflections, Öcalan decries “the fact that the anarchist movement has failed to become a mass movement like “real socialism” and has never had the chance to implement its idea.” He laments the anarchist “inability to develop an implementable system”. But many anarchists HAVE NEVER BEEN TRYING TO DO THAT TO BEGIN WITH and they weren’t even trying to do it when Kropotkin, as the last of the three anarchists he mentions, was still alive now more than one hundred years ago. So they do indeed “lack systematic thought about democratic politics and modernity and the related structures” because they have never considered that they needed this or that anarchy was about any such thing. Seeking consistency with their own beliefs and values which found such ideas incompatible with their own about autonomy, agency and free association, they have not valued consistency with the values of outside others. So when Öcalan says:

“*The question they [i.e. the anarchists] need to answer is why they were unable to develop or build an ambitious system that reflected their goals, a question that draws attention to the chasm between their theory and their lives*”

I think the answer is actually very simple: they have never tried to develop such a system to begin with because they do not imagine themselves a necessary collectivity as a whole and, indeed, many currents within anarchy itself would directly despise or disdain such an idea. This, in fact, is something Bookchin so clearly recognised – and rebelled against – in SALA, giving it as a specific reason for his disaffection with anarchy. Anarchy, as Bookchin

then came to understand, was simply not socialist (let alone programmatically socialist) enough. So it is then unsurprising that “they (i.e. the anarchists) have been unable to develop the option of a democratic nation in place of nation-state” because they never desired to in very many cases as anarchists who never had any duty to a Kroptkinite text or a Bakuninite edict or a Proudhonian idea. (In addition, I am not convinced that even these figures expressly called for “a democratic nation” either. Anarchists, even the more social ones, often fight shy of nations, states or governments – as many would say they should.) All this itself becomes relevant when Öcalan goes on to say:

“*Another important obstacle was their opposition to any type of authority, both theoretically and in their day to day lives. They displaced their rightful reaction to power and state authority onto all forms of authority and order. This affected their ability to develop democratic modernity theoretically and in practice.*”

This point is taken directly from Murray Bookchin (see my prelude to this book), for example in SALA, and it is clear that here the student has learned from the master for it is straightforward Bookchinite critique of the anarchism he surveyed in the 1990s that it takes antiauthoritarianism to levels which make any sort of representative decision-making body fundamentally implausible and undesirable. What neither Bookchin nor, seemingly, Öcalan have understood, however, is that this is nothing new and that “autonomy” has been in the DNA of anarchy all along. You can find self-styled anarchists of this ilk in 1880s Europe. So called “autonomists” were in America by the early 1890s too because Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman joined up with some after their split with the social anarchists of Johann Most. There are so-called “individualist” expressions of anarchy already as far back as Anselme Bellegarrigue in 1850 and, of course, Bookchin himself regards Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the first person to declare himself “anarchist”,

as suspect from a socialist point of view too. Non-anarchist figures who nevertheless inspired some of the early anarchists – such as William Godwin or Max Stirner and both before 1850 – equally develop ideas and theories which are often decried by the socialist inclined as excessively autonomous and so not dogmatically socialist enough.

In my view, the unrecognised fact in all of this is that, in reality, "anarchism" doesn't even really exist – not as a set body of theories, beliefs or values the anarchist must adhere to. One can example Proudhon or Bakunin or Kropotkin, as Öcalan does – but one cannot point to the anarchist standing order which says that anyone anywhere is duty bound to recognise, respect and follow their views. As stated before, and I am happy to state it again, there are no Proudhonians, Bakuninites or Kropotkinites in anarchy. There are, at most, anarchists – and anarchy means "no leaders", "no static authority invested in individuals". Yet Öcalan complains about "the inability to see the legitimacy of democratic authority and the need for democratic modernity." But this is not an "inability" – it is a refusal. It is a considering of the issues which comes to a different conclusion, being based in different desires, values and beliefs. Many anarchists simply do not want "authority" (even if you put "democratic" in front of it) for such authority is still authority and they see anarchy as antiauthoritarianism writ large. They thus demand and insist that they shall keep their autonomy regardless and regard this, not "democratic modernity", as the seminal value. Unlike the socialist, the anarchist is not led forward by dogma but by desire. It is a big difference.

Öcalan thus has the same blind spot Bookchin did and perhaps that is fitting. These two socialists (Öcalan has never been anything else whilst Bookchin at least imagined otherwise at some points in his life) want different things to many anarchists and that is perfectly fine from the anarchist perspective because such anarchists understand that

you should be allowed to want what you want, politically speaking. Öcalan writes as if anarchists went wrong somewhere and simply need to recognise some salient socialist facts they may have forgotten or need to be educated into but I think the reason for the difference is actually just more fundamental. Anarchists prize autonomy more than socialists do for socialists can only think in terms of groups and their right order(-ing) whereas anarchists think in terms of autonomy and antiauthoritarianism and imagine that the order should be left to sort itself out on the basis of agency and free association. In my terminology in this book the anarchists are then the wild ones and the socialists are the ones who constantly have the goal of making civilisations. An anarchist critique of this might then be that no one ever needed civilisations (or to be ordered) just like the actual wild never did and that such things have always brought their own centralising troubles as a consequence because it is an inevitable consequence of being ordered. The anarchist is then someone who should argue that freedom and liberty are constitutive OF LIFE and that ANY restriction placed upon that life is simply a constriction of life itself. Or put it another way: it is the socialist way to imagine that life should be set to a plan, even a scientifically rational socialist plan. But it is the anarchist way to imagine that life is a blank page that we will write on the journey that has no canonical path or pre-determined end.

As such, the socialists have misunderstood the anarchists and imagined that they are really just other socialists (like Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin) gone astray. But they are not. They are those who have a completely different idea about what freedom means, an idea which never relies on states, governments, nations or democracies or other formal political ordering which comes to mean authority and coercion. They are those who believe that the freedom is actually constitutive of yourself (“ownness”) and how you live your life whatever is going on around you and regardless of who is trying to organise it. For such people anarchy simply is life – self-organising life, autonomous life, life

comprised of will and of desire. And that remains true whether you walk your path alone or with others. So Öcalan has simply misunderstood anarchy like his teacher Bookchin did before him. Anarchy is not the organised society. It is the society which autonomously organises itself and manifests that ability above all others.

6. Wildness and Vulnerability: A Social and Cooperative Response

The question came out of the blue as I was discussing ideas with a friend. My friend knew I was interested in, and writing about, the wild and wildness. “But isn’t wildness vulnerability?” they said, completely serious about their question and its apparent assumptions. I stopped what I was thinking and considered their idea, surprised. It had never occurred to me that it is. In all my previous thinking and writing about people far more wild than I that was never really the impression I had gotten. I had rather been assuming the wild was the escape from vulnerability, in theory and in practice. Indeed, from my point of view a wild “vulnerability” is freedom, or, at least, one must go hand in hand with the other. One must equal the other for if you take the responsibility for yourself (which wild organisms do or have) I think native to the wild and to anarchy that must come with risk. The outside is by definition outside, undomesticated, uncoerced. But that means as a consequence that all I can read the assertion “the wild is vulnerability” as is the idea that at least in the prison cell (or the bubble wrap) of civilisation the person saying that might feel safe from the outside, the wild outside now imagined as oppressive where civilisation is imagined as respite from its oppression. So it sounds like a self-inflicted protective isolation from an outside they imagine as harsh and hostile. It speaks to particular, and unnecessary, imaginaries of both wildness and civilisation.

The position I aim to set out here, however, is one of civilisation versus the wild or “that which must make vulnerable, which multiplies vulnerabilities, versus that which provides you with all you need”. For in my eyes the situation is reversed: it is civilisation which is the oppression, that which makes vulnerable, and wildness which is the possible respite from it. If you have got to this point in my book you should surely have realised that by now anyway. So let me make my case.

A. Civilisation: A Rhetoric of Security Providing a Reality of Increasing Vulnerability

The back cover blurb of a recent book titled *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious* reads as follows: “Years of remodelling the welfare state, the rise of technology, and the growing power of neoliberal government apparatuses have established a society of the precarious. In this new reality, productivity is no longer just a matter of labour, but affects the formation of the self, blurring the division between personal and professional lives. Encouraged to believe ourselves flexible and autonomous, we experience a creeping isolation that has both social and political impacts, and serves the purposes of capital accumulation and social control.”

This, to me, is a valid description of this current civilisation. Civilisation: what do I mean by this so I can begin talking about it? It seems some sort of rhetorical definition is in order and by giving one I aim to set out broad truths rather than give something I would defend to the death. So “civilisation” I am thinking of as the increasingly centralised conglomeration and aggregation of human activity in various places across the globe. But it is also the centralised organisation of people and things as a network in and through these places. As such one might call human civilisation an attempted coup against all life on Earth which it seeks to subdue and control or, in other words, encapsulate, subsume. Consequently, key aspects of civilisation within this definition are that civilisation exists to control and exploit its surroundings and that it requires vast resources to exist as such. This leads to it being a suitable setting for hierarchy, patriarchy and fixed forms of economy such as capitalism and, in former times, open and organised slavery. Because it is based in and around control, tyrants and autocracies can also thrive there (for a time, at least). Civilisation grounds a certain sort of existence, a settled existence, which encourages the creation of power bases with which to control those without and within

through the creation of fixed relations such as political and economic ones of class or race or gender. Such settlements come to require a common morality, order, currency, day to day means of survival. They tend towards creation and ossification of customs and traditions which can harden into expectations and laws. Laws beget courts, jails and police forces. Civilisation also reproduces and, like anything that reproduces, it reproduces only more of itself. Thus, its confining tentacles reach out to subsume more of what is around it in order that it both operate and be utilised according to its logic and its will. Civilisation is both a material but no less importantly an imaginal reality. It posits and positions itself as THE way to live for everyone (i.e. as normality and by normalising). In this sense, and depending upon your perspective, civilisation can be imagined as either a safehouse or a prison complex with apparent justification.

Clearly there have been multiple differing civilisations throughout Earth's human history and I make no simplistic claim that they were all the same. But I do claim to have taken a good bite out of pretty much all of them, the Assyrian and the Roman, the Aztec and the Incan, the Ottoman and the modern Western, in there somewhere. By civilisation I do not mean culture and I regard cultures as different to civilisations (broadly and simplistically as subsets of the civilisational phenomena) but I don't want to get bogged down by detail. Civilisations are the mega-phenomena of human activity, the top level appreciation of such a thing, the forming of mass conglomerative and accumulative networks of human interaction, control and exploitation of the world environment around them and the life that exists within it. This should be understood morally as much as it should be materially.

Taking that as my rhetorical definition, we fast forward to the contemporary moment, the world we live in. It is a world beset, at least in the West of our common experience, with security rhetoric. And yet almost no one seems to feel safe. Everyone feels more or less

vulnerable instead. How can that be when the advertising done for this civilisation is that it is the pinnacle of human achievement with the evidence for its clear superiority over all previous forms of human life so obviously all around us? Well, put simply, in the story I want to tell this civilisation (and perhaps any example of the genus “civilisation”) is a liar, a dangerously exploitative, coercive and ruthless liar, a constantly gaslighting liar. In the story I want to tell, particularly our civilisation, this civilisation, is constantly telling you how secure it is, and how secure it can make you, whilst at the same time doing all it possibly can to keep you vulnerable – like a government that bans kids from social media whilst simultaneously leaving the people pushing harmful media untouched: it is the wolf in sheep’s clothing. So let’s dig into this idea with thirteen, sometimes overlapping, ways the civilisation of our experience makes us all constantly more vulnerable whilst erroneously claiming to make us more secure:

1. My first point is basic: civilisation is based on there being sovereign states (in today’s world this is sovereign nation states) and these states have governments. No one was ever consulted about the setting up of these entities in an originating sense. They are arbitrary inventions which claim sovereignty for themselves in a way very much like the secular analogue of gods. In fact, if gods had never existed could states have even been imagined, bearing in mind that kings and queens are themselves only earthly versions of gods as well? That aside, the reason these arbitrary entities make us all, each one of us, more vulnerable and less secure is that their very existence itself belittles and erodes our own personal agency and makes each one of us a dependent subject – and that as a foundational understanding of our very existence. In a world made of states your opinion about yourself is superceded by the state’s and subject to the will of its administration, the government. You have been born into a world of unfreedom, a world with an authority – and it is not you.

2. My second point is related to this and is that in such a context there is a fundamental imbalance of power in all kinds of general and particular scenarios, a vertical relationship has been created. It institutes a “leader and led” or obedience mentality or expectation in which there is an authority (perhaps one with special skills or knowledge or perhaps just with money and power or a social status that has been conferred upon it) that must be obeyed. This is not a given, a background reality to the universe, as it were. It is something deliberately invented and pursued, a civilisational form given to existence. Such a mentality become expectation coaxes acquiescence in general which, once more, leads to a general dependency in those existing within it. Dependency, I posit, is not security – and especially not when it is required as a matter of obedience.

3. Yet another aspect to this, in my third point, is the institutionalisation of civilised society in which all important functions are mediated through bodies the ordinary citizen has no control over. Institutionalisation essentially is one means of putting power over mass population into a few hands and then leaving that population at the mercy of said institutions. From the point of view of the citizens, it is simply handing power over to others – which is what voting also achieves in elections almost as if by design. One, however, has to seriously question the idea that giving your power away is any way to retain either the efficacy of that power or the agency that goes with it.

4. A fourth item entangled with these previous three examples is what I call “capitalist-authoritarian relations” which is my way of describing the prevalent vertical politco-economic relations in the world today. Here the economics is capitalist and the politics is authoritarian (leaders who presume obedience knowing they can deploy the threat of violence, violence which only they have the authority to deploy or utilise since they are the ones who also make the laws or the rules). Such relations as I am here imagining are

both coercive and predatory and enable practices such as variable pricing at checkouts which exploit the customer, consumerist mentalities which insist you must buy lots of things you don't actually need (which motivates near constant advertising at people in the modern world) and the requirement to purchase various kinds of "insurance" products since you don't want to be left with something broken, lost or destroyed you cannot fix or replace (something which actually uses fear of being seemingly vulnerable to motivate you spending your money). The point here is that the political mentality and expectation of obedience to authority that I introduced in a purely state sphere bleeds through politics into economics as well. Capitalism is an economic philosophy of coercion and exploitation in which the sole aim is to profit from things in a privatised way – and by the utilisation of a dominating position in the market if at all possible. There is no benefit to thinking of others separate from a transaction within capitalism in order that it might financially benefit you privately, you being thought of as in competition with everyone else. As such, this mentality preys on and utilises vulnerability to its advantage (one opportunity of vertical relations) and also uses security as a rhetoric regardless of whether it actually provides it or not.

5. My fifth point relates to the fragmentation of social ties in modern Western civilisation which has led to the normalising of individualism and isolated separateness in ways that in many cultures would be utterly unthinkable. This leads, for example, to people living alone in normalised ways and to thinking of their lives as "their own" and themselves as singular beings separate from other lives if not simply from life as a connected or collective phenomenon itself. There is then a sense in which people are thought to be "on their own" in an "every man (and woman) for themselves" kind of a way. This obviously then fits in with the capitalist idea that we are all in inherent competition with each other but what it easily leads to is a society of strangers or a plague of loneliness which in many

places becomes apparent. What I would further make clear here is that I do not view either personal agency or personal autonomy as matters that either rely on or require "individualism", something which, at its most extreme, becomes just a dogmatic anti-collectivity and isolationism, the creed of a culture that wants to make people vulnerable and prey to its coercions (whilst pretending this is freedom).

6. My sixth, again interconnected, point is probably related to what Michel Foucault called "biopolitics". What I mean here is things like surveillance, tracking, classification of people and things, bureaucracy and accounting, management activities by which people and things are collated, written up, made records of and accounted for. It is the ability to compile files on things and utilise and articulate them within partisan frames of reference so that they may become things that can be manipulated according to a given purpose or agenda. In the modern world such activities are, of course, capitalist-authoritarian as I previously discussed this term and so are carried out habitually by both state and capitalist actors as their normal means of operation. It encompasses acts from passport control to security cameras on every street corner or building entrance to the tracking of what websites you visit or the passing of Internet data to supposed "commercial partners". Such activity as is generally imagined here is just one reason, in the modern world, why anyone at all is judged to be in debt. It is because records of debts can be kept in the first place and assigned to a named, tagged and classified identity in a policed society.

7. My seventh point would generally be that one which so agitated the so-called Unabomber, Ted Kaczynski, and may be described as "industry and technology" as a kind of human activity and an arrangement of civilised life. In my view I see two equally important dangers here, the danger of pollution and the danger of control. On reflection,

however, there is an equally strong case for saying that industry and technology change who human beings are simply as a form of life and, as a recurring theme, this is a matter of a reduction of human agency and the imposition of a necessary dependency. (Think, for example, how life is different either with or without electricity – electrical grids being that which Ted Kaczynski identified as the core technological change which had changed who we are and how we can become.) In civilisation today whole populations are dependent on industrial and technological systems that provide basically every necessity of life except oxygen and life's necessities have been coopted and made to become products of industrial and technological processes, consistently degrading them all as a consequence to the detriment of all life. They also, I would posit, come with considerable mental health effects due to the way industry and technology alienates us both from each other and from life processes and environments in general.

8. My eighth point is to note that civilisation is expressly a mass form of existence that deals with coordinating, manipulating and organising mass populations in a way that essentially mandates or requires certain relations in a meta-societal way (i.e. civilisation is an organism which needs certain relations in order that it survive as it is). As such it proceeds by subsuming and encapsulating people *en masse* and, in some sense, ignoring their singularity in order to make them fit into a mass system of relations as their contextualisation. This is, looked at from another angle, to argue that civilisation in general does not work in order to facilitate individual autonomy or freedom. It often in fact works to negate it or frustrate it regardless of any rhetoric it deploys about the nature of itself.

9. It can be observed, ninthly, that civilisation, over millennia, has proved to be a strong foundation for cultural relations such as patriarchy, hierarchy and competition. Certainly,

we can say that civilisation does not seem to inherently have any defence against such relations developing, relations which obviously make some structurally more vulnerable to others as a function of their material and imaginal realities.

10. My tenth point is related to several of my previous ones and concerns primarily media and propaganda. Given our technological-consumerist situation, we now find that mass populations have been induced to acquire ownership of devices by which predatory others in either government or business (assuming you even accept these are different things in the modern world and not just a capitalist-authoritarian nexus) can both control what they receive on and through them whilst also tracking the users in their use of such devices. My point here, however, hones in on the political usage of such devices by means of which they become conduits for politically manipulative messaging (sometimes disguised as “news”) which can be continually fired at people in a perpetually rolling context which never gives them any respite (psychological warfare). Two common outcomes of this are the constant rage-baiting of users (who are being profiled as to what they look at anyway) and the presentation to them of stories and commentary which keeps them either in fear or acquiescent. The endgame of this activity, also carried out in newspapers and on radio and TV, and which should be seen as the coordinated activity of a culture rather than as matters of individual choice or action, is to steal people’s attention and keep them transfixed with narratives of their choosing. It is thus both a way of socially disengaging people, since they are now stuck looking at devices, but also of filling their heads with your ideas and values, a form of mind control. Consequently, I regard this, *in toto*, as a political class strategy of deliberate disempowerment.

11. My eleventh point concerns something of a civilisational effect in that civilisation, a phenomenon which, as a whole, imagines to transcend the wild, thereby alienates people

from it and from the skills and sensibilities it requires in order to live in it. This can be things as basic as being able to read the signs of nature as regards weather to skills in the acquisition of the basic necessities of life such as food and water or medicinal uses of plants. Such functions, in civilisation, are subsumed under other, sooner or later, mass produced and technological processes which make them distant from the population at large – who then lose the skills necessary, and the sensibilities required, as they no longer need them. I come to see this as one way by which civilisation places people at at least one remove from direct interaction with reality in that a disenchanting mediating layer is placed between people and the direct experience of it which can be generally described as “the civilised way of doing things”. Civilisation has, once more, changed who we fundamentally are and has made us dependent, reliant and as those who live in a disenchanted and mediated world. This, apart from anything else, demonstrates that civilisation is both a material and, just as importantly, an imaginal phenomenon. It sets people in a context that is in many senses deliberative and purposive and entirely consequential.

12. My penultimate point is to focus on centralisation as a phenomenon. Civilisation, we can observe, operates in and through the centralisation of power and distribution of resources (including social and political power) as a fundamental principle. This is tied to the authoritarian DNA of a civilisational organisation of relationships which is prone to requiring leaders, obedience, coercion and control, acquisition and possession, in order to keep its civilisational nature and shape. Obviously, however, such centralisation cannot expect to account for every nuance and diversity of actual lived reality and circumstance. Rather, the reality of centralisation is, once again, the expectation of obedience to ways and means centrally determined by those with the power or authority to require it. I note here, then, that centralisation of power, knowledge, resources, wealth and skill is a major

way in which a few can maintain control over the many and that it is centralised civilisations which, throughout historical reality, have required mass slavery in order to build and maintain their civilisations for as long as they could.

13. My thirteenth and final point is then a very simple and obvious one, perhaps all of the previous points turned into one general one: this is that you are not free and, furthermore, your lack of freedom, your active domestication, is assumed by those with power in civilisation. It is both assumed and required. Civilisation could not survive in the form or forms I have here briefly outlined if freedom or autonomy or real agency or freedom of movement and association adhered to people singly and collectively in any great amounts. Civilisation, as a matter of general principle, is a matter of obedience, following rules and procedures, and doing as you are told. Civilisation is the creation of a wholly domesticated environment of networked, often vertical, relations, understandings, practices and values. My argument is that, as such, it does not make secure: it makes unnecessarily but quite deliberately vulnerable; it works against the interests of specific people for a higher valued form of relations that ultimately serves an artificial and determined status quo.

B: The Wild: An Exercise in Imagination

Once upon a time there was a Russian prince and his name was Peter Kropotkin. At one time Kropotkin, of land-owning, aristocratic lineage, was an officer in the Russian army where, amongst other things, he served on several geological expeditions to Siberia which would later recommend him to the Russian Geographical Society for whom he did much work. Yet by the time he was in his thirties he had become a political activist agitating for anarchist communism (for which he was duly imprisoned in the formidable

Peter and Paul Fortress in St. Petersburg – and from which imprisonment, being temporarily removed to a lower security prison hospital, he duly escaped). Thereafter, he would spend the majority of his life in exile (and sometimes in prison) abroad where he became a propagandist and educationalist for anarchist communism as the best way to organise civilisation.

I mention Kropotkin for a particular reason, his book *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* which had been originally written to counter excessively competitive views of evolution by natural selection published in public journals in the late Victorian era as interpretations of naturalist Charles Darwin's epochal biological theories in *On The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*. It will be well known that both at the time and ever since people have taken these imagined scientific theories of evolution and applied them to pretty much anything they could get away with, whether such procedures were legitimate or not, arguing for life as a war of all against all and a grand competition with winners and losers in the process. For Kropotkin's part, he judged that excessively competitive ideas about evolution were distortions of the truth of his own considerable naturalistic observations besides such interpretations being things to which he would also be politically opposed in terms of their application. (It is worth noting that at this time evolutionary ideas of life being basically competitive and hierarchical were leading to things such as the invention and application of eugenics as well as so-called "scientific racism" and "social Darwinism" and so such proliferation was hardly benign.) Kropotkin wrote a series of essays in public journals throughout the 1890s in which he addressed both animals and previous human societies, showing in each case that it was cooperation and mutuality which led to a species' success and not merely their ability to win a battle through struggle or violence in a context of a universal and inherent competition for survival. It was his view that increasing cooperation was what pre-eminently led to

success in a given society or amongst a particular species and this suited his political as well as his naturalistic observations. So, for example, in his conclusion to *Mutual Aid* he can write:

"*it is especially in the domain of ethics that the dominating importance of the mutual-aid principle appears in full. That mutual aid is the real foundation of our ethical conceptions seems evident enough. But whatever the opinions as to the first origin of the mutual-aid feeling or instinct may be—whether a biological or a supernatural cause is ascribed to it—we must trace its existence as far back as to the lowest stages of the animal world; and from these stages we can follow its uninterrupted evolution, in opposition to a number of contrary agencies, through all degrees of human development, up to the present times. Even the new religions which were born from time to time—always at epochs when the mutual-aid principle was falling into decay in the theocracies and despotic States of the East, or at the decline of the Roman Empire—even the new religions have only reaffirmed that same principle. They found their first supporters among the humble, in the lowest, downtrodden layers of society, where the mutual-aid principle is the necessary foundation of every-day life; and the new forms of union which were introduced in the earliest Buddhist and Christian communities, in the Moravian brotherhoods and so on, took the character of a return to the best aspects of mutual aid in early tribal life.*"

The anarchist anthologist Iain McKay, meanwhile, can fill us in on the political views of Kropotkin. Writing in his Kropotkin anthology *Direct Struggle Against Capital* he writes:

"*(Kropotkin) defined anarchism as "the no-government system of socialism." In this he, like Bakunin, followed Proudhon who stressed that "the capitalist principle" and the "governmental principle are one and the same principle" and so "the abolition of the*

exploitation of man by man and the abolition of government of man by man are one and the same formula." It is "to protect this exploitation of man by man that the State exists" and so anarchists are "simultaneously striving for the abolition of capital and of the State" for "if you do away with the former, you still have to do away with the latter, and vice versa."

Kropotkin (like Bakunin) also accepted most of Proudhon's fundamental principles, such as workers' self-management of production, federalism, socialisation, anti-statism and anti-capitalism. He, like Bakunin, recognised the necessity of social revolution, rejecting Proudhon's reformism, as well as his patriarchy in favour of a consistent libertarian egalitarianism. He took Bakunin's union-based revolutionary anarchism and, like others in the IWMA, developed it towards an explicit acceptance of (libertarian) communism, the goal of distribution according to need rather than labour done.

For (Kropotkin's) anarchism capitalism is an exploitative, oppressive, class-riddled economic system defended by a centralised, hierarchical State. Kropotkin echoed this analysis of Proudhon and Bakunin: "it is evident that in present-day society, divided as it is between masters and serfs, true liberty cannot exist; it will not exist so long as there are exploiters and slaves, government and governed."

Modern society was (then) based upon the "liberty to exploit human labour without any safeguard for the victims of such exploitation and the political power organised as to assure freedom of exploitation to the middle-class." Its political and economic aspects "are facts and conceptions which we cannot separate from each other. In the course of history these institutions have developed, supporting and reinforcing each other" and so they "are connected with each other—not as mere accidental co-incidences" but "by the links of

cause and effect." The two were interwoven, as "the political regime… is always an expression of the economic regime which exists at the heart of society." This meant that regardless of how the State changes, it "continues to be shaped by the economic system, of which it is always the expression and, at the same time, the consecration and the sustaining force."

Echoing Proudhon's analysis of property as both theft (exploitation) and despotism (oppression), Kropotkin argued that under capitalism a worker was "forced to sell his work and his liberty to others who accumulate wealth by the labour of their serfs." Private property, as a result, meant that "individual freedom [has] remained, both in theory and in practice, more illusory than real" and that the "want of development of the personality (leading to herd-psychology) and the lack of individual creative power and initiative are certainly one of the chief defects of our time. Economical individualism has not kept its promise: it did not result in any striking development of individuality." This was for an obvious reason: "For the worker who must sell his labour, it is impossible to remain free, and it is precisely because it is impossible that we are anarchists and communists.""

The American evolutionary biologist and historian of science, Stephen Jay Gould, wrote an article in the journal *Natural History* about Kropotkin's naturalistic theory of mutual aid in June 1997. Called "Kropotkin was no crackpot," the short piece set out to argue that from a scientific perspective Kropotkin was far from talking nonsense and that the idea of cooperation was a scientifically useful one to the evolutionary biologist, one which said something pertinent about the course of life itself. In doing so, however, Gould says things that are useful to me in my enunciation of the wild – which is what this part of my essay is supposed to be about. It is strange to use Kropotkin in such an argument, however, for he was hardly an advocate of the wild. Being a man of aristocratic origins

well used to working in the organs and institutions of society prior to acting in the service of his later dissident views, his anarchism was a matter of the right way to organise civilisation so that it could be made to work efficaciously for all rather than my take which is to annihilate and abandon it for something else entirely. So even though I am going along with Kropotkin here, it is not exactly because I share his agenda. Rather, I see sense in some of the things he says whilst ultimately finding myself unable to come to the conclusions he wants to come to given the values that he, but not I, started with.

Gould's essay "Kropotkin was no crackpot" is a short essay about Darwinianism and Kropotkin's commentary upon it, one of multiplicitous uses and adaptations of Darwin's theories which flourished in the second half of the nineteenth century – and really ever since. Darwin's theories have come to be associated (rightly or wrongly – and not always in ways Darwin used himself) with various ideas such as "the struggle for existence" or "survival of the fittest" or that any species progresses by mutation and adaptation in what amounts to life thought of as a grand competition. That life is, in fact, competitive is one of the abiding ideas attached to Darwin's theories by various of his most vocal subsequent interpreters – for better or worse. This is not without consequence for if you are going to set up the arena of life as a competition then that motivates some actions but not others and leads to certain values but not others. In a time much closer to Darwin than we are today, for example, it motivated the invention of eugenics by one Francis Galton, a Birmingham-born cousin of Darwin himself. Reading Darwin's *The Descent of Man*, Galton concluded that "social engineers should identify and support 'those who were most likely to stock the world with healthy, moral, intelligent, and fair-natured citizens.' The 'stream of charity' being limited, however, they should favour 'the best-adapted races' for 'the speedier evolution of a more perfect humanity.'"

Being charitable here, we might argue that Galton is proposing giving imagined natural evolutionary processes a helping hand. But then, on the other hand, the wild needs no assistance in being what it is and arguing that nature works in a certain way does not mean that humans should deliberately set out, for their own reasons and to their own imagined advantage, to start preferring one type of life over another, calling the good "flowers" and the supposed bad "weeds" as one hagiographic biographer of Galton since has done. In the wild, life is life regardless of what it is and each is given its own fair crack of the whip to make of it what it will or what it can. In his own books Galton has the tendency to refer to human beings as cattle stock that need to be directed in their breeding – and in this I see nothing other than the haughty and arrogant "civilisation knows best" thinking which all examples of the type display. It is probably true to say that Darwin didn't make such leaps himself however – because he tended to adopt a neutral and abstract tone as if he were simply describing the innate workings of reality (which, by the way, he wasn't). But he certainly laid the fertile ground in which people like Galton and later others could – and did.

But back to Stephen Jay Gould's article about Kropotkin. Here Gould makes the argument that even if Darwin did actually talk about life as a "struggle for existence" this was in general an abstract and metaphorical framing if often with examples that were less so. This was because, according to Gould, Darwin got caught up in the musings of Thomas Malthus with regard to population where a spiralling population would sooner or later outstrip food sources and everything would become an ugly squabble for survival. Darwin does speak of species as like wedges which can only drive themselves into a niche by driving something else out and so the idea of competition is certainly at least present if not dominant in the overall narrative. This is only amplified by Darwin advocates such as Thomas Henry Huxley who turn life itself into a gladiatorial battle and sooner or later we

end up with Hobbes' war of all against all. Not surprisingly, as was the case with Hobbes, in these scenarios civilisation then enters the fray as that meant to impose order on the imagined warring chaos where nature itself, the wild, is simply the warring chaos. As a consequence, the wild can certainly serve as no moral guide – except perhaps as a salutary lesson in what to avoid. But is this to be fair to the wild? Is it unremittingly harsh and competitive, an eternal struggle of species locked in inevitable battle? The answer is no because, to just give a single common example of mine, it wouldn't explain why trees and mycorrhizal networks allow themselves to fuse together across species if they were meant to be in an antagonistic fight to the death that defined their survival. So perhaps, as a second option, nature is sometimes antagonistic and sometimes cooperative?

A third solution is that Stephen Jay Gould sees in Kropotkin's mutual aid. Interestingly, for me at least, this solution *does* want to find a basis for moral action in the activities of the wild (as I would call them). *Mutual Aid* the book was actually written as a counter to Huxley's gladiatorial interpretations of Darwin published in the late 1880s. It was Kropotkin's responses, which focused on animals and then various stages of human development, which were eventually collected together and published as the book. Kropotkin's point here is that the "struggle for survival" more often leads not to violent combat or deliberately sought out conflict, much less a life-long competition, but to cooperation and states of peace and mutual assistance – and that it is this which, more often than not, leads to evolutionary success. This argument would in some respects agree with the researches of various evolutionary anthropologists I have studied later on in this book whose arguments, for example in regard to the development of human language, require an evolutionary peace for, as they point out, you only need to talk to someone if hitting them over the head doesn't already get you everything you want. Language, then, requires exactly the sort of settled cooperation Kropotkin was talking

about in order to develop when he attempted to argue that cooperation not competition is actually a fantastic way to be successful at surviving.

And then there is the biological career of someone like Lynn Margulis to consider, much discussed in this book, whose entire work focus is on the fundamental importance to biology of every organism in relation to symbiosis, a theory that posits that life has actually progressed not by mutation and adaptation alone (organisms and even cells in competition) but largely by life forms literally living together with one another (sometimes this is even one inside another and Margulis herself argued that complex multicellular life began when one cell implanted itself inside another). Rather than privileging an inherent competition here, this theory of life almost posits the opposite, that a major way life finds to survive, from the cellular level up, is by teaming up with other life so that their fortunes then become entwined. Mutual aid par excellence!

Gould's explanation of this here takes a turn to become interpretational for he argues that Kropotkin's interpretation of Darwin, one which does not explicitly deny competition but which seeks very much to play up the consequentiality of cooperation as well, is redolent of a specifically Russian interpretation of Darwin itself, one which sees the competition narrative Darwin explicitly took on from the likes of Malthus as a specifically cultural one. Russia is the largest country in the world and contains vast open spaces, spaces Kropotkin had been through and studied. Contrast this with a Britain which, even as Malthus and Darwin wrote, was filling up with what William Blake had once described as "dark satanic mills". One comes to understand how Malthus might predict a future Armageddon and Darwin an inherently competitive life whereas the Russian might wonder what the fuss was all about. The suspicion then begins to arise that what the likes of Malthus and Darwin wrote about was rather more parochially than universally set.

In addition, Darwin did much of his naturalistic study in the tropics, the place on Earth most teeming with life and so a place where, if anywhere, he would see species rubbing up against species to propagate their existence and so somewhere that would remind him of Malthus' dire speculative warnings. But if you were elsewhere would you see the same thing? Kropotkin seems not to have observed it on the Siberian steppes. Interestingly, there are other Russian commentators of the time who identify "struggle for personal gain" as "the credo of a distinctly British national type" and this gives pause for interpretive thought if one imagines such a commentary carries weight and possibly applies to Darwin too. Are Thomas Hobbes, Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus and Charles Darwin then, and for example, a quartet of British men who argue in the direction of personal gain as life's ultimate motivation as a matter of British culture? If true, its probably something an outsider would see first and those like them might not see at all.

It is at this point that Gould credits Kropotkin with some nuance and some insight for there are actually TWO forms of struggle in Darwin. The first is the interpersonal struggle the competitive and individualist types like to labour at length. But there is also another kind of struggle, the one Darwin uses metaphorically, which is the struggle simply to survive as a life form in any environment. Any organism has to regulate its temperature, find food and water, protect itself from environmental dangers, etc. All are inherently vulnerable and must think of their security in multiple simultaneous terms. This is just to be alive. But it is exactly this kind of struggle, generally applicable to all life, which Kropotkin says is best served by cooperation and mutual aid. This does not stop interpersonal conflict happening but it is surely a fundamental form of survival in and of itself regardless. This is then the cooperation we see, to go back to my example, in forests. It is the cooperation apparent in the many examples of symbiotic life. It is a

fundamental way life survives at all in and across species: by living together to mutual and cooperative benefit.

This gives us an interpretational or imaginal quandary, however, for, looking at life, we can choose to take either the competitive or cooperational lessons – and in the history of evolutionary discourse many have picked either one or the other to social, political and moral consequence. In amongst all of that it seems to me questions are begged. What is civilisation? What is the wild? As you imagine them so will you value them and that will have a direct effect on how you imagine your security and your vulnerability too. It depends, for example, on which of the two struggles for life going on in Darwin you value, and so focus on, to the detriment of the other (if in fact you do that at all), the individualist one or the one that prioritises collectivity and social cooperation. Gould thinks that, under the influence of Malthusian narratives, Darwin came down on the side of the individualist struggle. This was unfortunate for it then paved the way for all those who came after him who thought that life was simply a personal competition that justified imperial conquest, racial discrimination and oppression of the powerless by the powerful where the idea is to “win” by “beating” everybody else at the game of life in all possible terms – which often meant simply in terms of power, influence and wealth. This led to the view that these were desirable things and that those without them were to be pitied and disregarded as life’s predetermined losers – those who were precisely not “the fittest”. Such a view in turn made people imagine the wild as a place of violent savagery and perpetual conflict until it became a biological principle and almost a duty to preserve the imagined fittest and strongest at the expense of the rest. It is impossible to believe any of this, however, if Kropotkin’s insights on mutual aid and social cooperation as being evolutionarily successful are given their due weight. A colony of bees or ants or the vast diverse reality of a forest environment simply could not exist if everything was in conflict

with everything else, locked in an eternal, and personal, battle for survival. “Sociability is as much a law of nature as mutual struggle,” claimed Kropotkin, before going on to add:

“*If we ... ask Nature: “who are the fittest: those who are continually at war with each other, or those who support one another?” we at once see that those animals which acquire habits of mutual aid are undoubtedly the fittest. They have more chances to survive, and they attain, in their respective classes, the highest development of intelligence and bodily organization.*”

It is interesting what Stephen Jay Gould has to say about this though. He asks why Kropotkin would lean to the socially cooperative side of the fence where so many other post-Darwinians leant on the individualist conflictual side. The answer, of course, is to answer the question: “What is your vision?” What can you see? What do you want? In which direction do your desires tend? In what view of the world are you held? What has your culturally arbitrated upbringing made to stand fast for you? What things, given who and where you are, could you not refuse to doubt? Gould basically says that people give voice to the beliefs and values they already have and just fit new information into such a template. On this view Kropotkin stands out because he refuses to follow the herd and rejects his cultural upbringing and programming. That fits because Kropotkin was an aristocrat turned anarchist communist. As anyone will see if they study such a thing, however, such people are relatively few and far between – and that is because the individualist, fragmented and manipulated society nurtured by capitalist-authoritarian civilisation wants them to be. Genuine, instinctive cooperation across races and species in freedom does not help civilisation out. It destroys it. Interpretational freedom to simply see the world as you honestly see it and participate in it does not help civilisation either. It also destroys it. The wild, a place based in freedom and with no autocratic will controlling

it and no manipulative or purposive complex of relations driving it in any particular direction, is simply the conglomeration of free relations. It is that which enables free and genuine cooperation to take place. It is that which leads to collectivity and mutuality. It is not mandated or required. It is not coerced or controlled. It happens because it can and because, being successful, it works. Kropotkin saw the value of such cooperation because he was of the imagination to be able to see it. All the prophets of individualist struggle and perpetual conflict were not – as they continue not to be to this very day.

Wild Imaginings...

I hope you enjoyed my little two part story. What follows? We can pursue this by asking two related questions: What gives security? What makes vulnerable? It will not surprise you after my story to find out that my wild perspective is that security, and the mitigation of vulnerability, comes from cooperative community and diverse and healthy social relations in general – and neither from either an individualist isolation produced by a civilisation that fragments and attacks social cohesivity or from handing your entire existence over to others as in the civilisational requirement of obedience to leaders. Such an answer requires that, instead, we pair social cooperation with social freedom as necessary partners in the pursuance and provision of maximum security and protection from vulnerabilities which we are all to some extent prone to simply by being living beings. This is also to create alliances of counterpower and autonomy in order that we can live without having to rely on extractive, exploitative and coercive others – or simply those who want to dominate and direct the narrative of all lives through constrictive and centralising social arrangements. Think, for example, of pirate communities – about which I can talk with you at length if you like.

Now I was once asked by someone whose intellect I value highly if wildness makes vulnerable. Given my brief survey, I can now say that I do not see how it does – especially of itself and as a consequence of its own activity – except in the sense that being alive makes vulnerable which would apply to any situation you could find yourself in anywhere and so as something which is not characteristic of the wild *per se*. But what definitely does make vulnerable, as of its means of operation which could be other, is the lack of freedom, the lack of autonomy and the lack of agency characteristic of modern capitalist-authoritarian civilisation. In this civilisation your vulnerability and lack of security has been adopted as a business model and imposed, a deliberately manipulated form of relations calculated to keep you in a vertical exploitative situation and state of existence. Say what you like about the wild, but you will never be able to say that.

What such discussions reveal, however, is also that the issues of security and vulnerability are, like all human issues, imaginal ones and not merely material ones. What makes you feel safe? What makes you feel vulnerable? These are questions we can only answer personally based on our experience of life in culture and how we have responded to that. But this informs us immediately that how we think and feel is part of the answer to those questions. To imagine danger is to feel scared. To imagine safety is to feel safe. Neither, by the way, are necessarily the case in a wider context but then that is the point: what you think and feel is pertinent to the question regardless of wider material realities. It is a question of exactly how you think and feel and not just what it can be determined material realities are because such realities never tell you how to think or feel about them and there are no arbitrary responses or reactions to them. There are only the ones you have that could be other if you could only change your relation to them (i.e. see them differently).

In talking about how we see things I would then just like to take issue with something Stephen Jay Gould writes in his discussion of Kropotkin. Towards the end of his piece he writes, “Nature is not intrinsically anything that can offer comfort or solace in human terms.” That statement baffles me somewhat. I walk in nature every day and receive both comfort and solace on the vast majority of occasions. Now we can quibble over the “intrinsically” in Gould’s statement but then I question whether anything is anything “intrinsically” at all anyway. Things are subject to linguistic interpretations, indeed, they are constituted by them like magic conjurings or enchantments but these are not re-presentations of the things but uses of them in rhetorics or imaginative fictions. Nature is not intrinsically anything and that, in fact, is why it is not a risk to your security or something that sets out to make you vulnerable. For it does not set out to make you anything (unlike civilisation more obviously does). It is simply the possibility for, and crucible of, life itself, the rollercoaster ride you are thrown into at birth and which you must ride, surely not alone, until your particular symbiotic cluster of trillions of cells inevitably ceases to exist in its current concatenation.

So let me tell you a more positive story, a story of what I like to think of as positively wild people. It is a story that I think illustrates what I have been saying. It is a story about how the pirates of the Golden Age came to exist and it is told by the pirate historian Markus Rediker in his book *Villains of All Nations*:

“*The sailor who embraced the Jolly Roger after 1716 came from a potent experience of life and labor in a wooden world. The sailor’s workplace, the deep-sea sailing ship, was something of a factory in those days, a place where ‘hands’—those who owned no property and who therefore sold their labor for a money wage—cooperated to make the machine go. Sailing these small, brittle wooden vessels over the forbidding oceans of the globe, the*

seaman took part in a profoundly collective work experience, one that required carefully synchronized cooperation with other maritime workers for the sake of survival. Facing a ship captain of almost unlimited disciplinary power and an ever readiness to use the cat-o'-nine-tails, the sailor developed an array of resistances against such concentrated authority that featured desertion, work stoppages, mutinies, and strikes. Indeed, the sailor would invent the strike during a wage dispute in London in 1768 when he and his mates went from ship to ship, striking—lowering—the sails in an effort to make merchants grant their demands. Facing such natural and man-made dangers, which included a chronic scarcity of food and drink and a galling system of hierarchy and privilege, the sailor learned the importance of equality: his painfully acquired experience told him that a fair distribution of risks would improve everyone's chances for survival. Separated from loved ones and the rest of society for extended periods, the sailor developed a distinctive work culture with its own language, songs, rituals, and sense of brotherhood. Its core values were collectivism, anti-authoritarianism, and egalitarianism, all of which were summarized in the sentence frequently uttered by rebellious sailors: 'they were one & all resolved to stand by one another.' All of these cultural traits flowed from the work experience, and all would influence both the decision to turn pirate and how pirates would conduct themselves thereafter…"

What this teaches us, I think, is that what gives security and mitigates vulnerabilities, although of course never absolutely, is cooperative social polity, community, genuine and multiple relations. It is generally noted across species that life is socially entangled and facilitated (hence ecosystems). After reading this essay, I hope it now seems obvious why. This is why in my past and current work I am working with ideas such as cooperative promiscuity or social egoism. It is why, expressly learning from observation of the wild like Kropotkin, I want to speak about creating relational affluence and communities of desire

based on affinity relations. We need cultures of cooperation and to build specific kinds of social materiality, kinds that take liberties, kinds that imagine liberty, kinds that pair social freedom with social cooperation such as we find in the wild but all too often not in civilisation by design and by determination. We need to build the rhizomatic root networks of cooperative selfishness and amorous camaraderie, counter-communities of communal self-actualisation. But what must be emphasised most of all here, taking the wild as our model, is that none of this is mandated or organised from above. It is always a matter of what comes up from below.

It is civilisation that preaches security but delivers only deliberate vulnerability. It is the wild which gives you both the freedom and the social opportunity to secure yourselves.

7. Daoism's "Philosophy of Nature"

When we are discussing "Daoism" what we are discussing is "Wayism" for Daoism is literally the philosophy of the way. That way is known in Daoism as "the Dao" which just means "the Way". Daoism, in modern context, has a reputation for being a "way of nature" – and for being closely allied with nature in its philosophies and ideas and so it seems good to me, as one with a flirting acquaintance with Daoism over several years, to delve into this a little bit and see if I can make some sense of this in a way useful to my project. As the backbone of this process I am going to be relying on James Miller's chapter from *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology* titled "Daoism and Nature". (Daoism, perhaps confusingly for some, can be seen as both a philosophy and a religion. But I have no time here to go into that.) I will be adding to Miller's article from other ancient and modern sources as necessary, however, in order to elucidate various Daoist views on nature (yet never simply Daoism's view for Daoism is simply a matter of various Daoist interpretations and never a singular view) and to get at how Daoists seem to understand it. As will be seen, it is in ways considerably different than Western ones. As a brief orientation exercise of this kind, allow me to share some words from scholar Brook Ziporyn who has this to say about a "minimally discernable (Daoist) tradition" in one of Daoism's most ancient texts, the *Daodejing*:

"*(Here is) the core of (a) minimally discernible tradition, the opening shot of what comes to be called Daoism (as found in the Daodejing). This way of thinking stands in sharp contrast to those philosophical traditions, such as we find for example in the dominant strands of ancient Greek thought and its inheritors, which assume that 'like begets like,' that 'from nothing nothing comes,' and apply this principle to the origin of all things. The upshot of those traditions is that whatever is good must come from something good, usually*

something even more good than itself, or even from what is perfectly Good; if there is any being or value or order in the world..., it must be an emanation of some prior being or prior value or prior order, which ends up requiring that these must all be in some sense always priorly existing, not to have arisen at all, but to have always been in some sense present, perhaps 'eminently,' in the eternal or infinite, perhaps in the divine. The Daoists do not think like that, partially perhaps because their ontological premises—that a 'being' means a determinate being, and that every determinate being is what it is relative to an indeterminate background–do not allow for an absolute ontological dichotomy between being and non-being. This way of thinking, arguably rooted in, or at least encouraged by, certain peculiar features of the classical Chinese language in which it was developed, admits of no definite state which does not arise from a prior not-being-that-state, just as there is no definite being that does not appear in a context of surrounding entities that are not it. For the idea of 'the whole world' to have any meaning at all, this term must be intelligible, but to be intelligible requires us to presuppose some non-world around it, in which it exists. If I say 'the universe exists,' I am already presupposing a non-universe in which it exists, or in contrast to which it exists. In this sense, even 'all that exists' must exist 'in' something else. The same would apply to a deity or any other putative origin of all things imagined to have originally existed prior to anything else: the idea of any entity existing alone in the universe, at any point in time, is unintelligible, since it requires simultaneously positing the surrounding context in which it exists. Even 'non-being' or 'the original void in which all arose' will have to be in something else, if it can be said to exist at all, which it must do to do its work of being determinately non-being (i.e., definitively excluding 'being'). Thus we arrive at the conclusion that if there is in fact anything eternal and omnipresent, it must thus be something that is in some sense not even any definite being–in some sense a formlessness, but not even a definite formlessness…

Dao in this tradition is thus unlike many conceptions of an ultimate reality or origin or deity, in that Dao is not the apotheosis of A, the extension and glorification and worship of what is fully formed (i.e., of the definite and the certain) and of what is valued (i.e., 'the Good')– but rather just the reverse, the glorification of B (its opposite or alternative). It is not the glorification of a divine purpose, but rather just the reverse, the glorification of purposelessness. It is not the assurance that everything is in some sense in good hands, that control is the ultimate cosmological fact, but just the reverse: that no one and nothing is in control, and that this is the best possible news; non-control is the unsurpassable fact everywhere and always, but it is also where all that we may identify as goodness, including even control itself, actually comes from, and is always in some sense made of." (Brook Ziporyn, "Interpreting the Daodejing: 'The Minimally Discernible Position'")

All that might sound strange and confusing at first but it is my job in this wild aside to try and nudge the reader who is confused by this in the direction of an understanding so that we can come to contextualise nature or the wild more adequately in Daoist context. So let's get on to what James Miller has to say. Miller begins his essay by noting that if Western science, with its humanist values, has been in many senses prolifically successful in its aims and goals, it has done this at the cost of much life on earth. Indeed, Miller overtly makes the point that it has done this largely by setting itself up over and against all the non-human life on earth, plant, animal or bacterial, and has simply denominated it "resources" or "stuff". The Western individual formed in and through hundreds of years of this particular cultural matrix has become the human being that is set against nature, whose life is formed in an antipathy to nature, the latter something turned into a kind of warehouse for the machine society. As scholar Jing Liu puts this in his essay "What is Nature?" – an essay about the Daoist concept of *ziran* which I shall return to later:

"*Nuclear weapons, pollution, global warming, water depletion and so on, all these problems that are brought forth by modern science and technology are now threatening human existence and forcing us to foresee, actually, an end of human history… Francis Bacon (once) exclaimed that through the medium of science men should become 'masters and processors of nature'. In fact, men should 'put nature on the rack and torture her' so that nature will be revealed and exploited according to men's needs. What's significant here is the only too conspicuous fact of the affinity between patriarchy and the violence against nature. Nature is viewed as a 'her', though not a 'her' that demands respect due to her nourishment of all, but a 'her' that needs to be conquered and, in fact, 'tortured'.*"

Meanwhile, Miller, echoing this point, himself says:

"*Put simply, the anthropocentric humanism of the European Enlightenment mentality is beginning to clash profoundly with the findings of contemporary holistic sciences. This clash is far greater than those between fundamentalists and secularists or between socialists and capitalists, for fundamentalists, secularists, socialists, and capitalists all share the same view of the primacy of humans within the scheme of things. Evolution, however, tells us that humans share the same genetic roots as other animals; ecology tells us that human life depends on plants, trees, bacteria in a whole host of interlocking ecosystems; environmental science makes it abundantly clear why we owe ethical obligations to the nonhuman world. All of this flies in the face of religious views that regard a single god as the focal point of human life and equally in the face of the European, secular, and patriarchal humanism that expelled such a god from the center of the universe, only to replace him with 'man.' In traditional Christian and modern Enlightenment views, human life is radically incommensurable with animal and plant life, not deeply related to it; human*

creativity depends on the strength of our mind or soul to transcend nature, not the weakness of our bodies that are inscribed within it."

Consequently, it may be expected that in an essay like this, that is in a book like this, that in talking about Daoism we are to find that it takes a different path from the one the West took. Be reassured, it does. It is time to introduce "the Way". Miller reports:

"*Daoist historical self-understanding is construed in terms of the concept of the Way. The Way is not the product of a divine creative act, nor is it a divine agent. Rather, the Way is the emergent process of creativity by which the cosmos becomes what it becomes. The cosmological premise of one of the earliest Daoist texts,.. (the Daodejing), is that the natural world is not a collection of interacting objects set in motion by a divine being but rather a dynamic system of vital processes whose basic character is that of self-transformation. The universe was not created by any external creative act, but rather subsists as a complex of 'ways' that are wholly spontaneous or self-generating... (The Daodejing chapter 25) summarizes this view rather cryptically in the phrase 'Daofaziran', which may be translated as 'ways take as their model their own capacity for self-generation.' The principle that this Daoist maxim enshrines, therefore, is the capacity of life to shape itself independent of any external impetus or teleology. Things simply come into being of their own accord; they are not enacted by divine fiat according to some mythic metanarrative or with any external purpose. Nor are they the consequence of some all-encompassing karmic logic of cause and effect. What is ultimately significant for Daoists, therefore, is not the agent (does God exist? who am I?) or the value of the product (is the universe good? did I do a good deed?), but the mode of agency (how do I do?).*"

Daoism, that is to say, is concerned with “manner of operation” and you may notice that I used this phrase earlier in my project when talking about nature in my preliminary introductions. My association with Daoism, and with its way of understanding, its philosophy, was the reason why I did that. For Daoist interpreters it is fundamentally important that what exists is self-generating and, in fact, self-transformative. James Miller explains further:

“*What is instructive about this Daoist cosmogony is the use of the Chinese term ‘sheng’, which means ‘generate’ or ‘give birth to.’ This cosmogony is different from the Neoplatonic account of creation which sees differentiation as the fundamental cosmogonic process. In that account, the multiplicity and diversity of the universe arises out of the splitting up or differentiation of some primordial unity. The Daoist account, however, is quite different. One does not divide into two, nor two into four. Rather the one becomes, as it were, pregnant with itself and gives birth to two; two becomes pregnant with itself and gives birth to three. In this way we may understand the process of Dao—the ways of our universe —as a sort of recursive, fractal-like complexity in which life takes up itself into itself and emerges into a yet more complex form. The result of this ongoing creative process is the ten thousand, or myriad, things, (often referenced in Daoist texts), the complex imbrication of life processes that together constitute the self-organizing collectivity of life.*”

This lends to Daoism a somewhat alchemical view of life – and Daoism historically certainly does have its actual alchemists, not least in the medical field and due to its fascination with the body-nature relationship. For the Daoist all that is, including nature, is self-transforming (rather than being transformed by agents or forces external to them, divine or otherwise, that have purposes and/or goals). Consequently, as Miller notes, “The

ideal state is achieved through embodying the complex transformative power of nature rather than denying it."

In the context of my project this should not be surprising and those paying attention should have picked up that they have heard this somewhere else before. They in fact heard it when I was discussing the work of the biologist Lynn Margulis in one of my intros for there I talked about "autopoiesis" in the matter of biological life, the self-making or self-creation that Margulis, a Western biologist fully immersed in the canons of Western biology, ascribed to life itself after the others who first brought it to Western biological attention. This is an idea very similar to the Daoist one and so, as Miller continues:

"*The autopoietic, self-generating character of nature provides the key component of the locative self-understanding of the Daoist. Daoists do not view themselves as inscribed within a single mythic framework of sin and salvation or creation and redemption but rather recognize the multiplicity of transformations within the universe and their place within them…*

This suggests that what is primordial in the Daoist conception of the universe is diversity. Diversity is explained not by a god who creates and names specifically different things but by assuming as fundamental the process of transformation within the universe, namely, the Dao or Way. All the things that exist within nature exist not because each was separately created (as in the Genesis story) but because nature transformed differently... If we understand evolution as the nonteleological emergence of a self-organizing complex of life processes, there is (then) a startling overlap with the Daoist conception of the natural self-organizing spontaneity (ziran) of the universe. In Daoist terms, nature is natural because it is self-generating, not because it is a creation that follows divinely ordained natural laws.

Once we realize that the cosmos is not fulfilling natural laws that aim toward some final goal set in place by some transcendent creator, this has important ramifications for our view of ethics and, in particular, human intention and agency. In the Daoist view, value does not consist in the achievement of some teleological goal or conformity to some transcendental ideal. Rather, the value of a thing consists in the process of transformation that is inherent in its own process of being. Accordingly, the core value espoused by Daoists, namely, spontaneity or the capacity for autonomous self-transformation (ziran), derives directly from the Daoist understanding of nature. Nature is both a description of the universe and a value to be espoused by humankind. There is no fact/value distinction, one of the principal hallmarks of the modern (philosophical) worldview. In the terms of the Daodejing this spontaneity is actualized through adherence to an ethic not of action but of nonaction. By practicing an ethic of nonaction, Daoists value the capacity for self-transformation that is inherent within things and generally do not seek to exert influence through external creative acts."

At this point it may help if I divert from Miller's script for a while and do some spade work explaining key Daoist terms and their interpretation by both ancients and moderns. This is necessary because unless we can understand the concepts Daoists are working with, their intellectual space, we will find it difficult, if not flat out impossible, to understand their ethos as a whole. Let us begin immediately here with the just mentioned "nonaction". This term, *wuwei* in Chinese, does not mean "no action" or "not acting". "Nonaction", or "actionless action" as it is also sometimes translated, does mean a kind of action. The best translation I have seen in English is "unself-conscious action", a kind of action divorced from being either too knowing or deliberate or purposive or intentional. Is this not the kind of action things have in nature? Hopefully why that is so will become clearer as we move on and to that end I am now going to move to discussing that word I have

mentioned a few times already, *ziran*, for in the eyes of many this word itself is the key to unlocking all the rest and the whole Daoist ethos and approach. But just before that I ask you to consider some historical perspective provided by the scholar Ellen M. Chen. In her book *In Praise of Nothing: An Exploration of Daoist Fundamental Ontology* she explains an historical philosophical difference of emphasis into which our understanding of the emergence of Daoism, and its conceptual particularities, can fit. She comments:

"*The Daodejing (which is generally regarded as the earliest significant Daoist text) is for the return to a primitive egalitarian society. Hierarchical division (here it is so thought) leads to contention... True unity and peace are attained not by class division but by returning to an earlier unity in the ontological ground. For (others, however, such as the already existing Confucians), inequality is the only way humans can advance beyond the (what is thought of as a) crude state of nature; he who possesses more mind has the right to rule, indeed, to exploit, those with less mind.*

In Confucianism, ren (humanity), yi (righteousness), and li (ritual or prescribed behavior) are cardinal virtues as achievements of human culture, necessary for the maintenance of a well-ordered society. For the Daodejing, they are steps departing from Dao (the Way) and de (its virtue); ren as compassion for humans separates humans from non-human creatures, yi as loyalty to father and prince separates human groups, and li ranking individuals into different classes separates individuals in the same society. For Daoists, the imposition of human order on nature's spontaneity (its ziran nature, as it were) is exactly what invites disorder, both in nature and in human society, hence the statement that 'li (ritual or prescribed behaviour) is the beginning of disorder' (Daodejing, ch. 38)."

Here Chen can refer to a speech given by Confucius himself in which he discusses the evolution of government and sets that in two historical periods:

"*When the Great Way prevailed there was impartiality throughout the world. They chose the worthy and capable who were trustworthy and cultivated harmony. They did not treat only their own parents as parents, their own sons as sons. They enabled the old to live out their lives, the able-bodied to have employment, the young to be reared; they pitied the widow, orphan, childless and sick, and provided nurture for all. Men had their occupations, women had their homes. They hated wealth going to waste, not hoarding it for themselves; they hated man-power not being fully employed, not using it for themselves. Therefore, evil plots, having no outlets, did not start up, and theft and banditry did not arise, so outer doors were left unlocked. This condition is called the Greater Harmony.*

Now, the Great Way having been obscured, one identifies the world with one's own family. Each treats only his own parents as parents, his own son as son. Wealth and effort are for oneself, with the rites recognizing only hereditary succession for rulers. It is by walls and moats that we secure ourselves, by ritual (li) and group loyalty (yi) that we are regulated. This is how we keep ruler and subject correct, father and son sincere, elder and younger brother in harmony, husband and wife in accord; in this way we institute restrictions and measures, lay out fields and villages, praise courage and knowledge, claim merits for ourselves. As a result plots spring up, wars arise... This is called the Lesser Prosperity."

The point of this recitation, with its Great Harmony but also its period of Lesser Prosperity, is to highlight that books such as the *Daodejing* or the *Zhuangzi*, the other key text for Daoists, "looked back to a time when human beings were one with nature" (i.e. the Great Harmony rather than the Lesser Prosperity). They saw something in nature that

was valuable, something that they thought should be emulated and not lost. (In this we may muse that they were like the Greek Cynics with which they were contemporaneous, if each in their own culturally spontaneous and idiosyncratic ways.) But, as a consequence, Chen can suggest that:

"*Daoism propounds a primitivism, which views the advancement of knowledge to be the cause of disorder and unhappiness in the world; the more knowledge the people acquire, the more they depart from the innocence of nature. Returning to the simplicity of nature or the state of Huntun (Chaos) is how humans can regain the equilibrium of nature. The sage (in Daoist texts) is charged with the task of returning society to the original harmony between humans and nature, when the people lived in their original unknowing state, in the spontaneity of instinctive existence.*"

This suggests why Daoists prefer unself-conscious action, an action they see in nature. So, now going on to an explanation of what Daoists mean by *ziran*, the quality or characteristic Daoists regard nature as having and modelling that makes it what it is as something to be distinguished and exampled alongside unself-conscious action, we may start here by noting that for at least one modern interpreter *ziran* is the Daoist version of the more modern autopoiesis as I have already suggested. That is, it is self-creation, the capacity for self-creation, beings as self-creative. It is Brian Bruya who points this out in his book *Ziran: The Philosophy of Spontaneous Self-Causation.* He gives as an analogy the very natural example of a seed which, set in moist, warm soil, simply grows, as Bruya has it, "of its own accord". Another scholar, Jing Liu, in his essay "What is nature: Ziran in Early Daoist Thinking", wants to take an etymological tack and to begin relating it to actual use in key texts like the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*. This is necessary work for only in its use in context can we actually get to the heart of the matter. Consequently, a key passage

here is *Daodejing* chapter 25 which talks about four related subjects, the human, the earthly, the heavenly and the Dao. They are, naturally, all related (for everything is related in Daoism in and through the Dao). The key section which exegetes focus on comes at the end and may be translated as straightforwardly as possible as:

"*The human emulates the earthly,*
The earthly emulates the heavenly,
The heavenly emulates the dao,
the dao emulates ziran."

A key thing to remember in trying to understand this is the self-transformative emphasis Daoists have about all that is, and isn't, *in toto*. The whole is constantly transforming itself in and through its ziran nature, its self-generativity, which is both what makes it what it is but also what keeps it going with diversity on its way. It is both engine and characterisation. Note that this section of the *Daodejing* says "Dao emulates ziran". Here, as Liu points out, Dao is not a thing. For the Daoist such as Zhuangzi, "that which things is not a thing itself". As Liu puts this, "Dao is not a being, or a substance. Neither is it any idea or principle... nor a law as in Greek metaphysics." Dao, the Way, can be imagined both as the "root-source" of everything but also as "nothingness", as both determinacy and indeterminacy AT THE SAME TIME. Recall that Dao simply means "way". And like a way or path it can be made simply by walking it, both there and yet also not, at the same time much like you might make a path by walking across a meadow. Dao is the way that unfolds and, according to *Daodejing* 25, it does this by emulating *ziran*, spontaneous self-creation. In and through doing so, everything comes to be and everything goes away again in a reality made of self-transformation as both a characteristic and an ethic.

There is another, perhaps better, way to understand this and it is presented by W.A. Callahan in his essay “Discourse and Perspective in Daoism: A Linguistic Interpretation of Ziran”. He writes:

“*I translate dao as ‘discourse’ rather than by the traditional metaphysical interpretation of ‘The Way.’ In so doing, I wish to underscore the verbal primacy of dao as a mode of action that entails communication among the parts constituting the event. I extend the meaning of discourse metaphorically beyond human speech to the interrelations more generally in nature, from simply human communication to a communion of all parts.*”

This is a very helpful understanding it seems to me. Imagine “Dao”, the Way, simply as a grand conversation, the conversation which implicates all things in making it up from below. In this imaginary everything is imagined as taking part in such discourse as simply what it is, each speaking with its own voice, its own “perspective action-discrimination” as Callahan calls *ziran* in this understanding. What all that talk, which is simply being self-organising, self-creative, makes up is the grand conversation, the Dao. The beauty of this metaphor is that conversations or discourses are dynamic things and naturally in their course simply change, transform and metamorphosise as they will according to their own logic which is no logic at all. Speak with others for an hour and you will find yourself roaming over all sorts of topics in all sorts of different ways with the connections, twists and turns impossible to predict in advance. You do not know where you will end up and, quite often, neither is there any pre-determined endpoint. Discourse and conversation are self-generating, self-guiding and self-actualising. Note also that “the discourse” itself both is and isn’t there. The participants are there, and they are interacting, constituting the discourse as such, but that discourse itself is not a substance in its own right. It is and it isn’t. Callahan then integrates *ziran* into this analogy by regarding it from the

ontological reality of one of the conversational or discursive participants. *Ziran* is that facility of having a perspective to make distinctions among actions in a certain way, a self-soing or unreflectively and without intention or determination being what one is. But, at the same time, it is in a relationship with things like "having desires and propensities" but also "conventional action". *Ziran*, recall, means "spontaneity" or "self-so". It is a matter of so-ing one's self in and through one's action, an instinct or intuition much more than an intention or deliberation. It is a being concerned with manner of operation, how one is and so a "doing what comes naturally". *Ziran*, Callahan then says, is the method of the Dao, referring back to the verses from *Daodejing* 25. The Dao takes *ziran* as its method and because it does nature itself is *ziran*. So in *Daodejing* 25 Callahan:

"*sees both dao and ziran as methods that a composite whole of nature uses in its action and interaction. The 'discourse' in this chapter is the greater communion of parts that constitute this composite whole of nature.*"

As a fuller explanation of the stanza from *Daodejing* 25 I quoted Callahan then says:

"*First the composite whole is realized: humanity looks to the broader context of Earth as a model, then Earth looks to the broader context of Nature (the cosmos) as a model. The composite whole of Nature emerges through a process. The discourse-dao, which is the communion of parts within Nature, is this process. This dao of communion interrelates each part by entailing action-discrimination from each part's perspective as its method of interaction. Thus ziran is used as the method for a harmonious interrelation of parts within the cosmos.*"

Using this scheme everything is built up from all that is having a *ziran* nature, a vision of "myriad perspectives" interacting together in self-transformative self-creation that allows us to imagine the conversational Dao, the Way that flows in and through all things in their diverse interactions. *Ziran* is then essentially the equipping of everything that is with its own perspective and impetus and skill to live out its existence in and through it. The interaction of this diversity and particularity is then what makes the whole, what makes conversation possible, what makes cooperation or conflict possible. It is in a way both an argument for the primacy of autonomy and agency as what enables anything to happen at all and also an argument for what makes any existence genuine or authentic. As a consequence, this interpretation can easily be seen as political. Callahan in fact sees it as political himself:

"*In examining what the Daoists were arguing for rather than arguing against, we can see that the consequences of this interpretation of ziran and Daoism are indeed political: there can be order without an orderer, a ruler. Each part has its own unique basis of judgment and action, yet this does not lead to chaos. It leads to a form of anarchism in which there is human-human and human-nature interrelation, not atomization and separation: all the parts coexist and cooperate within the gradations of composite wholes. This is not politics in the colloquial sense of elections and laws, but politics in the more basic sense of harmonious interrelation and interdependence of parts in human society as well as in the larger compound of nature… The genuine is (then) an expression of nature rather than human civilization; nature is not separate from us, for as 'parts' we not only compose nature, but we are nature. The only way to be genuine is through the process of perspectival action-discrimination. Without ziran, we are forced back into the conventional perspective and the embellishments that it produces.*"

A Daoist place where we can extrapolate on this further is in the interpretation of one Guo Xiang, an ancient Chinese philosopher of the 3rd and 4th centuries who has attracted attention from modern scholars because he takes an interpretation of *ziran* explicitly as a means to his interpretation of, and commentary upon, the text of the *Zhuangzi*, one of the two preeminent Daoist texts. One modern scholar who writes on this extensively and persuasively is, once again, Brook Ziporyn whom we heard from earlier giving his "minimally discernible position" on the Daoism contained in the *Daodejing*. Now turning to Guo Xiang's interpretation of the *Zhuangzi* – which honours *ziran* as its guiding concept and so which means we should take onboard all we have studied so far – he writes that he calls Guo's position "antifoundationalist immanent apophatic mysticism". But what does this mean? Ziporyn continues, writing in a Foreword to Christine Abigail Tan's *Freedom's Frailty*, a book about Guo Xiang's philosophy of self-realisation, that:

"*By 'antifoundationalist,' in Guo's case, I mean something very thoroughgoing indeed: I mean the denial of any source or ground, any overriding first principle or underlying original substance—for the world, for the person, for morality, for one thing happening rather than another, for anything at all.*

By 'apophatic mysticism,' I mean the claim that there is a ubiquitous dimension of experience that is beyond all predicates, that cannot be grasped by thought or speech, and that there is something very important about realizing or communing with this dimension or considering one's existence in relation to it, because this dimension is beyond all oppositions and conditions, beyond all characterizations.

These two claims may strike some readers as directly contradictory to one another: on the one hand the denial of anything 'beyond' whatever happens to happen, and yet on the other

hand the affirmation of the ubiquity of something 'beyond' all predication. But that is precisely where Guo's genius lies, and it is here too that we see one of his most influential insights. For what I have called a dimension of experience is not the same as an actual entity. It is not that there is some other entity beyond what happens that is beyond comprehension; it is that the very fact of 'happening' is in a certain important sense beyond comprehension, and cannot be attributed to anything beyond itself—or even to itself. There is a sense in which 'attributing' or 'reducing' anything to anything else is nonsensical. This 'sense' is what I am calling a 'dimension'—and this dimension is a 'mystical' dimension…

(So then) There is nothing beyond the happening of whatever happens, but whatever happens itself is beyond definite explanation and beyond finitude. In being untouched by finite predications, this ubiquitous dimension of all experience is thus also the locus of what Professor Tan calls a 'logic of convergence,' a nonduality of apparent opposites, that is crucial to living well, that might even be the solution to the greatest existential problems of human life, that in some sense not only allows for the transcendence of all the contradictions and conflicts to which life is heir but is also beyond the reach of time and death.

I therefore call this apophatic mysticism 'immanent' in Guo Xiang's case because unlike what is the case for most apophatic mysticisms, in this case that the locus of this dimension of experience that is so importantly beyond all possible predication and explication is not God, not the One, not Brahman, not the Dao, not Heaven, not Substance, but each particular event happening anywhere at any time. Every single event is seen to be absolutely valuable, not because it is rooted in a pure substance, not because it was designed and created by a benevolent deity, not because it serves a divine purpose, but precisely because it is not and it was not and it does not: it represents and rests on nothing

beyond itself, it does not come from any divinity either good or evil, and it does not serve any purpose, nor is it the epiphenomenon of a neutral material substratum (e.g., "Nature") that has some claim to priority or reason to be celebrated by virtue of its role as the generative root of all existence. Each event is an absolute good not because it is a manifestation, an effect, or a cause of something that is Good, but rather because it is none of the above. Its goodness comes not from its relation to something else, but is rather just what is left when all interference from alien valuations are removed from our perception of it: it is good because its own inexplicable and unjustifiable existence is another word for its goodness to itself. For Guo, for an event to be what it is just is the establishment of its affirmation of its own value, indeed it is the only source of any meaningful sense of the idea of 'value' itself. When freed from erroneous and superfluous attempts to ground it, to explain it, to justify it, to relate it to some value it may have as part of a larger whole, as working within a system, as contributing to a higher good, as caused by a divine intention, as serving some higher purpose, it is simply its own self-rightness, the only kind of rightness there is."

What this seems to speak to for me is a marrying of the ideas of autonomy, authenticity and affirmation. The idea is that I realise myself, I authorise myself, I determine myself, I actualise myself, I value myself; I am most myself when I act without deliberation or intention according to what comes naturally as an expression of myself; I act as a being that is self-organising. Except this is not a merely humanistic notion, something about how human beings operate or should operate, it is an idea that is imagined to apply to all life, to all things, that is consistent throughout that which we call "nature" or "the wild", and so to the course of all things imagined as a whole or a discourse. ("Dao emulates ziran.") It is the idea that this is the impetus behind being and becoming, the reason the universe is a matter of self-transformation, diversity and concatenations of relationships

and interactions, and how the Dao discursively produces its Way. It is the idea, in effect, that value and meaning itself is self-generating, self-organising, self-determining.

Ziporyn has more to say about this, and about *ziran* specifically, in another essay he writes, this time in relation to Guo Xiang's exegesis of *ziran* itself in his chapter included in the *Dao Companion to Daoist Philosophy, Number 6*. Here we find that "the Dao is 'original Non-Being'... conceived of as prior to and transcendent to all particular beings, the source of all existence and the matrix of the determinate principles by which all things operate… Yet when it comes to *ziran*:

"*The term ziran occurs occasionally in both the Daodejing and Zhuangzi, generally denoting simply the way a particular thing is when not interfered with from outside.*"

Here Ziporyn translates the end of *Daodejing* 25 ("Dao emulates ziran") as "Dao models itself on the way each thing is of itself" (i.e. without interference, "the condition of things contrasted to deliberate or extrinsic action upon them"). Extrapolating this through the interpretation of Guo Xiang, Ziporyn then quotes him as saying that "all forms form themselves" (this being meant to teach us about how creation occurs) and that forms transform themselves such that "creation is without any Lord or Master." Consequently:

"*Guo takes this to imply that Being per se is necessarily ungrounded in anything else (Dao being nothing else but "discourse" or "original non-being"), and this ultimately applies to any individual instance of being as much as it does to Being-as-a-whole. Though there may be a particular chain of connection between some particular being and prior beings, since ultimately this chain can never lead back to any ultimate grounding, the entire process of trying to ground one thing on another comes to naught, and we are better off abandoning*

it entirely when considering what things ultimately are; in the end, the totality of things and thus each thing, turn out to be causeless."

Guo concludes that "each being is an inexplicable self-creation" and this is said with the sense of it being what we would call the nature of things (in fact, the nature of the whole whose character is disseminated in and throughout things). The nature of the universe itself is *ziran*. Or, as Ziporyn exegetes Guo's interpretation, "the only real 'itself' of any given entity is just this self-so (of ziran)". Each thing is then really its own thing, an unknown and an unknowable and "identity", such as it is, becomes an enigma. The external identifications people habitually use are then revealed as simply that – external uses and usages, more about the needs of the one using them than any genuine identification of the thing named or described. A fly is not a fly. A tree is not a tree. A caterpillar is not a caterpillar. Gay is not gay and straight is not straight. These are customary names used for and according to customs. The identity and value in any thing, and the only thing worth these names "identity" and "value", is then *ziran*, the character and value of things in themselves, revealed in and through their self-actualisation and self-realisation. This is almost certainly why, especially if you read the *Daodejing* or the *Zhuangzi*, you will find the texts seemingly disdaining knowledge and recommending what can only seem as ignorance by comparison. The simple fact is these Daoist texts find no real value in what the common people call knowledge since they see it as ingenuine and inauthentic in these terms. They are uses and not self-so, *ziran*. So *ziran* is not, and cannot, be based on such imaginary knowledge either. The self-creation and self-organisation it envisages is neither informed volition nor deliberation based on knowledge. According to Guo, things are "all unconsciously and abruptly thus and self-so". Ziporyn explains this in the following way:

"*Thus we see that when Guo says all things are 'self-so,' he means that they are what they are without being made so by anything apprehendable by any consciousness, be it their own conscious volition or a transcendental Dao, or anything else that may be taken as a cause as a definite entity, which can only be a figment of trace-cognition. No identifiable entity, internally or externally, makes them as they are. This self-forgetting, in turn, is what makes them 'self-so' in the other sense, that is, self-right, possessed of inalienable value.*"

I have, I think necessarily, gone into this at length. It now remains to integrate this into a more holistic overview of Daoism such as James Miller was providing for us earlier. So, to continue with his script, Daoism's view of nature and spontaneity revealed as "self-so", "self-creation", "self-generation", etc., developed on the basis of physical observation, often quite literally in terms of "the body" and wider material reality. Dao, as part of its philosophy, believes that everything is made of an energy ("Qi") and this is where Daoism's perhaps more well known philosophy of "nature as balance" comes into play – perhaps most famously in the philosophy of yin and yang which is native to Chinese contexts historically. Yin and Yang can be understood like an electrical circuit as positive and negative for the purposes of comprehension so the ideal is to create a circuit in which energy is always flowing and balanced. As Miller explains this:

"*Nature, then, is unitary in that it is comprised ultimately of one energy matter, Qi. It has a binary characteristic, however, in its positive and negative charges. This duality leads energy to flow in a circuit. When it flows in a circuit it achieves a state of balance or homeostasis. This simple pattern, readily understood by analogy to energy, Daoists take to be the fundamental pattern of nature. Everything can be explained in terms of positive and negative forces which produce a circular flow and tend toward a systemic balance. Viewing the body, and by extension nature, as a dynamic system that tends toward an overall*

equilibrium is a further point of agreement between classical Daoist philosophy and contemporary systems thinking.

This holistic, systemic view of the body and the cosmos leads Daoists to view nature in terms of the correlations between its various dimensions and not in terms of the sequential cause and effect that is a characteristic of Indian theories of karma and classical scientific views of logic… the Chinese cultural imagination came to depict the achievement of balance in terms of time, space, and the body. The achievement of balance through the harmony of yin and yang occurs through the constant circulation of energy. This principle is the same at the micro and macro levels, and the various dimensions within which this circulation occurs function interdependently with each other… Daoists view balance and systemic equilibrium as a virtue. In this Daoist worldview, balance or harmony in fact can be regarded as a supreme virtue, not in the sense of some abstract ideal of goodness or justice, but rather as the natural process of balancing out of the diversity of forces so as to attain an equilibrium that proves beneficial for the whole. This value encourages a type of systems thinking that recognizes irreducible diversity and dissuades thinking in the dualistic terms of good versus evil… goodness consists of the optimal health of a system comprised of various interdependent subsystems."

But, as James Miller then goes on to say further, this leads to a fluid conception of life's existence as the *Daodejing* itself suggests in its 8th chapter when it says "Be like water." Miller writes:

"*The reason why Daoists and practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine espouse a holistic view of the relationship between the body and the cosmos is that their view of the body is more porous than we might expect. This concept can be understood in terms of Qi*

which, in the early medical texts, was viewed not simply as the system of energy within the body but more generally as a type of 'influence' or 'wind,' that is, a kind of fluid that transmits power. Human health, moreover, is maintained not simply through the homeostasis within the body, but by maintaining an equilibrium between the body and its environment…

The most basic procedure for maintaining this harmony is breathing. Thus many Daoist meditative techniques pay close attention to regulating breath, that is, the passage of Qi as air or breath from outside to inside our bodies and back again. Each time we exchange a breath we are exchanging aspects of our physical environment and our internal physiology. Since breath is the basis of life, we can define life in the basic Daoist sense as the continuous exchange of energy between environment and body. When this exchange ceases, then life ceases…

The Daoist view of the porous body can thus be regarded as an ecological view because it tends to mitigate against the perception of the self as an autonomous, isolated mind within a physical container. Rather the effect of Daoist practices is to nurture a sense of self as thoroughly translucent to one's environment… The idealization of an increasingly diaphanous and porous body can be interpreted in contemporary terms as an ecological sense of self. My argument here is that this ecological sense is grounded in the Chinese view of nature as a fluid process rather than a material substance. In fact, matter or 'stuff' is not the basis of the Daoist view of nature. Rather, its basis lies in water… 'Highest good is like water. Because water excels in benefiting the myriad creatures without contending with them and settles where none would like to be, it comes close to the way' (Daodejing 22)… The unique property of water is that it benefits the myriad creatures (wanwu) without contending with them—without causing them any harm. The Chinese term wanwu is rather

unusual in that it includes humans, animals, and plants in a single biological category. The most important ecological connection between these three life-forms is that they are all dependent upon the earth's water cycle. To be alive, to be one of the myriad creatures, is achievable only through water."

So where does all this leave us in our attempting to understand nature or the wild from a Daoist point of view to round this essay off? It leaves us with:

Self-transformation (as the character and activity of all that is)
Diversity (that is an irreducible and fractal consequence of this)
Dao (as the discourse of existence yet which has no substance of its own)
Ziran (natural, self-organising, self-affirming, self-generating spontaneity - "the core value espoused by Daoists" and also the meaning of value itself)
Wuwei (unself-conscious action, the natural companion to ziran)
Purposelessness (combined with lack of deliberation and intention – have no plans)
Balance (as a self-transforming conversation constantly seeks out a common mean)
Nature (as a fact, a value and a manner of operation)
Holism (since all is relationship and interaction and there is nothing that is not One)
Flowing (as the energy of the universe flows this way or that – and this way and that)

This leads me to imagine some proposals or understandings as a consequence:

1. Nature as *ziran* leads to the view of nature as spontaneous, self-arbitrating. As such, any domestication at all of nature becomes illegitimate, authoritarian behaviour. Leave things alone. They need no caretakers. They arbitrate themselves without overarching authority.

2. Nature is cooperative and “attractive”. It seeks social engagement which can become a means to aid or symbiotic life. It is a pluralistic endeavour of “becoming together”, an egoistic co-existence from a subjective point of view.

3. Nature is consequential and, in fact, the ultimate consequence. It is not “given”. No laws or authorities require it to be just so (or self-so). What can happen will happen.

4. In nature, individual actualisation is what enables social strength. The willing solidarity is better than the coerced. This is “selfishness creating the possibility for collectivity” and it also creates a certain equity since everything joins in order to provide for itself. Things find self-motivated ways to help each other out.

5. Conflict, which in a world of spontaneity can easily arise, is not simply a negative but helps nature thrive just as cooperation does too. Conflict is necessary for no one thing must ever come to dominate all since that is the path to death of the whole. Defending yourself with your capacity for self-actualisation is just another tool (like cooperation) in the array of natural things which takes place in a grand scheme of balance. That grand scheme or interaction of all, one may imagine, is why everything just doesn’t destroy everything else – and so the whole as well.

6. Consequently, nature requires diversity and the richness of the diversity is vital to its operation. This is something fascists and all authoritarians have never understood.

7. Nature is inter-relating systems of relations that can and do shape environments (perhaps even potentially the whole earth if you find the Gaia Hypothesis has legs). This can be net positive or net negative for life and its diversity and so in impact on the natural

world. It is not just relation of organism to organism, however, but also of organism to environment and conditions. This has not just environmental or planetary consequences, however. Its scope is literally cosmic. Reality as connection and interconnection.

8. Nature is when you leave things to themselves, their natural self-direction and their natural consequences.

9. Nature is that which doesn't intervene, which has no plans (not least for the whole).

10. When it comes to nature, it is impossible to draw a hard and fast and permanent line between "life" and "environment". Especially if all is just transforming forms of energy.

11. Humans are part of nature not set apart from it. The thought "all is one" is not a naive or even inaccurate idea when literally everything can and does interact with, and affect, everything else.

12. Nature is not an authority or policeman of behaviour (anything can literally do what it can) but it does have a manner of operation and flow in a certain way Daoists have called *ziran*. Consequently, one can go either with or against this flow with the requisite consequences accruing accordingly. Daoism is consequently the philosophy of a nature that is best left to organising itself and that only disintegrates under any attempt to organise it arbitrarily.

13. Nothing is more important than anything else.

In short, *Daofaziran*.

8. A Wild Anarchy of Life

"*Life as a whole expresses itself as a force that is not to be contained within any one part... The things we call the parts in every living being are so inseparable from the whole that they may be understood only in and with the whole.*" — Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The scholarly grandfather of anarchism is the Russian, Peter Kropotkin, and one of the efforts of his scholarship in the service of an educated anarchist-communist anarchism was his book *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution*. The book intervenes in the rabid interest in Darwinism that was tearing through late Victorian society and, in many cases, being twisted and manipulated into eugenic creeds that were injurious to human society. The book sets out to demonstrate, first from animal observations which he and others undertook and then from observations of past human societies, that it is mutual aid, human cooperation, and not conflict or competition, which is the pre-eminent factor in a species' survival. That being the concluding observation, of course, Kropotkin thinks there is political hay to be made from its sunshine. So, in his introduction, Kropotkin notes that, in his own observations of animals, whilst posted in the wilderness of Eastern Russia, "I failed to find — although I was eagerly looking for it — that bitter struggle for the means of existence, AMONG ANIMALS BELONGING TO THE SAME SPECIES." He adds that:

"*wherever I saw animal life in abundance, as, for instance, on the lakes where scores of species and millions of individuals came together to rear their progeny; in the colonies of rodents; in the migrations of birds which took place at that time on a truly American scale along the Usuri; and especially in a migration of fallow-deer which I witnessed on the Amur,*

and during which scores of thousands of these intelligent animals came together from an immense territory, flying before the coming deep snow, in order to cross the Amur where it is narrowest — in all these scenes of animal life which passed before my eyes, I saw Mutual Aid and Mutual Support carried on to an extent which made me suspect in it a feature of the greatest importance for the maintenance of life, the preservation of each species, and its further evolution."

Such observations induced Kropotkin to conclude that the "progressive evolution" of no species could be based on the pre-eminence of conflict or "periods of keen competition". Yes, to be sure, conflict and cooperation, perhaps as poles of our lived experience, are permanent aspects of the struggle for life and the activities of all livings things on earth. This much Kropotkin observed and also affirmed. Yet, says Kropotkin, "I was persuaded that to admit a pitiless inner war for life within each species, and to see in that war a condition of progress, was to admit something which not only had not yet been proved, but also lacked confirmation from direct observation." Kropotkin seemed to come to the conclusion that, yes indeed, things do struggle, fight and come into conflict in and amongst themselves all the time. They are largely after the same resources, after all, so this is hardly to be a surprise. But what actually prospers a species, WITHIN ITSELF, is its ability to cooperate with its fellows, form mutual relationships and do things that, left to themselves, individual examples of that species could never do — prospering the survival and health of that species as a whole. Kropotkin concluded, then, that mutual aid helped a species more than the necessary conflicts it must also, from time to time, engage in as well.

In discussing "mutual aid", however, Kropotkin wanted to make sure that his readers distinguished that aspect of social animal existence from "love". He did not want people

to confuse mutual aid with “love to my neighbour”, for example. Writing at some length, he says:

“*It is not love to my neighbour — whom I often do not know at all — which induces me to seize a pail of water and to rush towards his house when I see it on fire; it is a far wider, even though more vague feeling or instinct of human solidarity and sociability which moves me. So it is also with animals. It is not love, and not even sympathy (understood in its proper sense) which induces a herd of ruminants or of horses to form a ring in order to resist an attack of wolves; not love which induces wolves to form a pack for hunting; not love which induces kittens or lambs to play, or a dozen of species of young birds to spend their days together in the autumn; and it is neither love nor personal sympathy which induces many thousand fallow-deer scattered over a territory as large as France to form into a score of separate herds, all marching towards a given spot, in order to cross there a river. It is a feeling infinitely wider than love or personal sympathy — an instinct that has been slowly developed among animals and humans in the course of an extremely long evolution, and which has taught animals and humans alike the force they can borrow from the practice of mutual aid and support, and the joys they can find in social life.*

The importance of this distinction will be easily appreciated by the student of animal psychology, and the more so by the student of human ethics. Love, sympathy and self-sacrifice certainly play an immense part in the progressive development of our moral feelings. But it is not love and not even sympathy upon which Society is based in mankind. It is the conscience — be it only at the stage of an instinct — of human solidarity. It is the unconscious recognition of the force that is borrowed by each person from the practice of mutual aid; of the close dependency of every one’s happiness upon the happiness of all; and of the sense of justice, or equity, which brings the individual to consider the rights of every

other individual as equal to his own. Upon this broad and necessary foundation the still higher moral feelings are developed."

Kropotkin then perceives "mutual aid" (which is an instinct for cooperation by another name rather than the deliberate, pre-meditated actions of a knowing intelligence or the exigencies of love) as a wild endowment of living things and, given his later comments on those Darwinists who, in his mind, had twisted Darwin's own assertions in the direction of Hobbes' "war of all against all" or a perpetual struggle for survival dubbed "survival of the fittest" (a description of Herbert Spencer's and not Darwin's), sees the promotion of mutual aid as a necessary factor in the correct scientific understanding of the behaviour of animal societies, the pre-eminent factor, in fact, in terms of their prosperous evolution. Kropotkin's point, then, is not that such cooperative and sympathetic sociability replaces or destroys "mutual struggle" in the business of life but that it is as much a factor as its more conflictual fellow phenomenon and ultimately more important in terms of the evolution of a group. Thus, for example, "the need of leaving progeny necessarily brings animals together and the more the individuals keep together, the more they mutually support each other, and the more are the chances of the species for surviving, as well as for making further progress in its intellectual development." Consequently, in the opening two chapters of *Mutual Aid*, Kropotkin details numerous animal observations, by himself and others, which example mutual aid in the wild, establishing beyond doubt its actuality and necessity — from crabs who guard other crabs as they moult their shells to pelicans that fish in a half circle that narrows towards the shore in order to corral their catch.

Such "life in societies", Kropotkin says, is not merely about the need to protect the reproductive faculties and cycle of animals. Its not just about protecting the nest or den

whilst the young ones grow up unmolested. Kropotkin argues that mutual aid exists not merely for security but "chiefly for the pleasures derived from it." Yet we must be aware that in Kropotkin's time, with the revolution in thinking that Darwin's evolutionary researches had brought, and with the plethora of malignant intellectual forces that were ready to turn them into justification for social, political and economic oppression, Kropotkin wrote his book in order to show that throughout nature (at least the animal part of it) sociability, cooperation, mutual aid, was the rule of evolutionary prosperance and NOT perpetual conflict (as obvious and necessary as conflict was in its own right). Thus, he says:

"*Sociability — that is, the need of the animal of associating with its like — the love of society for society's sake, combined with the 'joy of life,' only now begins to receive due attention from the zoologists. We know at the present time that all animals, beginning with the ants, going on to the birds, and ending with the highest mammals, are fond of plays, wrestling, running after each other, trying to capture each other, teasing each other, and so on. And while many plays are, so to speak, a school for the proper behaviour of the young in mature life, there are others, which, apart from their utilitarian purposes, are, together with dancing and singing, mere manifestations of an excess of forces — 'the joy of life,' and a desire to communicate in some way or another with other individuals of the same or of other species — in short, a manifestation of SOCIABILITY PROPER, which is a distinctive feature of all the animal world.*"

Consequently, Kropotkin adds that, "Life in societies enables the feeblest insects, the feeblest birds, and the feeblest mammals to resist, or to protect themselves from, the most terrible birds and beasts of prey; it permits longevity; it enables the species to rear its progeny with the least waste of energy and to maintain its numbers albeit a very slow

birthrate; it enables the gregarious animals to migrate in search of new abodes." It also further makes sense when he says that "life in societies would be utterly impossible without a corresponding development of social feelings, and, especially, of a certain collective sense of justice growing to become a habit. If every individual were constantly abusing its personal advantages without the others interfering in favour of the wronged, no society would be possible." "Life is struggle," Kropotkin says (agreeing here with Nietzsche), but, nevertheless, or perhaps because of that fact, animals work together, enjoy each others' company and help each other out. In this regard he shares examples of animals who have clearly gone out of their way to assist or help out associates (such as animals who feed their blind fellows or others that carry away their injured fellows) when they could easily have been abandoned or left behind. Kropotkin describes these as "certified acts of compassion between wild animals at liberty". We can certainly say they were acts that required expenditure of energy and time in a struggle for survival called life and so ask why these animals were doing these things?

Because of a sociability thought useful for life, a cooperative instinct, the necessity of mutual aid, Kropotkin concludes. Kropotkin ends his chapters on animal examples of this phenomenon with the following two paragraphs as conclusion:

"*Happily enough, competition is not the rule either in the animal world or in mankind. It is limited among animals to exceptional periods, and natural selection finds better fields for its activity. Better conditions are created by the ELIMINATION OF COMPETITION by means of mutual aid and mutual support. In the great struggle for life — for the greatest possible fullness and intensity of life with the least waste of energy — natural selection continually seeks out the ways precisely for avoiding competition as much as possible. The ants combine in nests and nations; they pile up their stores, they rear their cattle — and thus*

avoid competition; and natural selection picks out of the ants' family the species which know best how to avoid competition, with its unavoidably deleterious consequences. Most of our birds slowly move southwards as the winter comes, or gather in numberless societies and undertake long journeys — and thus avoid competition. Many rodents fall asleep when the time comes that competition should set in; while other rodents store food for the winter, and gather in large villages for obtaining the necessary protection when at work. The reindeer, when the lichens are dry in the interior of the continent, migrate towards the sea. Buffaloes cross an immense continent in order to find plenty of food. And the beavers, when they grow numerous on a river, divide into two parties, and go, the old ones down the river, and the young ones up the river and avoid competition. And when animals can neither fall asleep, nor migrate, nor lay in stores, nor themselves grow their food like the ants, they do what the titmouse does, and what Wallace (DARWINISM, ch. v) has so charmingly described: they resort to new kinds of food — and thus, again, avoid competition.

'Don't compete! — competition is always injurious to the species, and you have plenty of resources to avoid it!' That is the TENDENCY of nature, not always realized in full, but always present. That is the watchword which comes to us from the bush, the forest, the river, the ocean. 'Therefore combine — practise mutual aid! That is the surest means for giving to each and to all the greatest safety, the best guarantee of existence and progress, bodily, intellectual, and moral.' That is what Nature teaches us; and that is what all those animals which have attained the highest position in their respective classes have done. That is also what man — the most primitive man — has been doing; and that is why man has reached the position upon which we stand now, as we shall see in the subsequent chapters devoted to mutual aid in human societies."

Setting Kropotkin to one side now, the examples I want to give from nature in this chapter are not animal or human ones but plant ones. Plants, after all, far outnumber animal life on this planet. One estimate I read in my research for this chapter described the biomass of the planet as something like at least 80% plants, an astounding majority. (Add in bacteria, which is second in the list, and this accounts for 95% of the mass of all life on Earth. Animals [including humans] are a tiny percentage.) Most of the life on this planet, consequently, is not fluffy and cute but green, somewhat alien and absolutely necessary for the survival of the tiny bit of life on this planet that is animal for, without animals, the plants carry on evolving as before; but without plants their would be a mass extinction event in regard to practically all known animal life.

Let us begin our plant exploration, then, with a fairly lengthy quotation. This quotation comes from Peter Wohlleben's book *The Hidden Life of Trees* and it constitutes the first chapter thereof, titled "Friendships":

"*Years ago, I stumbled across a patch of strange-looking mossy stones in one of the preserves of old beech trees that grows in the forest I manage. Casting my mind back, I realized I had passed by them many times before without paying them any heed. But that day, I stopped and bent down to take a good look. The stones were an unusual shape: they were gently curved with hollowed-out areas. Carefully, I lifted the moss on one of the stones. What I found underneath was tree bark. So, these were not stones, after all, but old wood. I was surprised at how hard the 'stone' was, because it usually takes only a few years for beechwood lying on damp ground to decompose. But what surprised me most was that I couldn't lift the wood. It was obviously attached to the ground in some way.*

I took out my pocketknife and carefully scraped away some of the bark until I got down to a greenish layer. Green? This color is found only in chlorophyll, which makes new leaves green; reserves of chlorophyll are also stored in the trunks of living trees. That could mean only one thing: this piece of wood was still alive! I suddenly noticed that the remaining "stones" formed a distinct pattern: they were arranged in a circle with a diameter of about 5 feet. What I had stumbled upon were the gnarled remains of an enormous ancient tree stump. All that was left were vestiges of the outermost edge. The interior had completely rotted into humus long ago—a clear indication that the tree must have been felled at least four or five hundred years earlier. But how could the remains have clung onto life for so long?

Living cells must have food in the form of sugar, they must breathe, and they must grow, at least a little. But without leaves—and therefore without photosynthesis—that's impossible. No being on our planet can maintain a centuries-long fast, not even the remains of a tree, and certainly not a stump that has had to survive on its own. It was clear that something else was happening with this stump. It must be getting assistance from neighboring trees, specifically from their roots. Scientists investigating similar situations have discovered that assistance may either be delivered remotely by fungal networks around the root tips—which facilitate nutrient exchange between trees—or the roots themselves may be interconnected. In the case of the stump I had stumbled upon, I couldn't find out what was going on, because I didn't want to injure the old stump by digging around it, but one thing was clear: the surrounding beeches were pumping sugar to the stump to keep it alive.

If you look at roadside embankments, you might be able to see how trees connect with each other through their root systems. On these slopes, rain often washes away the soil, leaving the underground networks exposed. Scientists in the Harz mountains in Germany have discovered that this really is a case of interdependence, and most individual trees of the

same species growing in the same stand are connected to each other through their root systems. It appears that nutrient exchange and helping neighbors in times of need is the rule, and this leads to the conclusion that forests are superorganisms with interconnections much like ant colonies.

Of course, it makes sense to ask whether tree roots are simply wandering around aimlessly underground and connecting up when they happen to bump into roots of their own kind. Once connected, they have no choice but to exchange nutrients. They create what looks like a social network, but what they are experiencing is nothing more than a purely accidental give and take. In this scenario, chance encounters replace the more emotionally charged image of active support, though even chance encounters offer benefits for the forest ecosystem. But Nature is more complicated than that. According to Massimo Maffei from the University of Turin, plants—and that includes trees—are perfectly capable of distinguishing their own roots from the roots of other species and even from the roots of related individuals.

But why are trees such social beings? Why do they share food with their own species and sometimes even go so far as to nourish their competitors? The reasons are the same as for human communities: there are advantages to working together. A tree is not a forest. On its own, a tree cannot establish a consistent local climate. It is at the mercy of wind and weather. But together, many trees create an ecosystem that moderates extremes of heat and cold, stores a great deal of water, and generates a great deal of humidity. And in this protected environment, trees can live to be very old. To get to this point, the community must remain intact no matter what. If every tree were looking out only for itself, then quite a few of them would never reach old age. Regular fatalities would result in many large gaps in the tree canopy, which would make it easier for storms to get inside the forest and uproot

more trees. The heat of summer would reach the forest floor and dry it out. Every tree would suffer.

Every tree, therefore, is valuable to the community and worth keeping around for as long as possible. And that is why even sick individuals are supported and nourished until they recover. Next time, perhaps it will be the other way round, and the supporting tree might be the one in need of assistance. When thick silver-gray beeches behave like this, they remind me of a herd of elephants. Like the herd, they, too, look after their own, and they help their sick and weak back up onto their feet. They are even reluctant to abandon their dead.

Every tree is a member of this community, but there are different levels of membership. For example, most stumps rot away into humus and disappear within a couple of hundred years (which is not very long for a tree). Only a few individuals are kept alive over the centuries, like the mossy 'stones' I've just described. What's the difference? Do tree societies have second-class citizens just like human societies? It seems they do, though the idea of 'class' doesn't quite fit. It is rather the degree of connection—or maybe even affection—that decides how helpful a tree's colleagues will be.

You can check this out for yourself simply by looking up into the forest canopy. The average tree grows its branches out until it encounters the branch tips of a neighboring tree of the same height. It doesn't grow any wider because the air and better light in this space are already taken. However, it heavily reinforces the branches it has extended, so you get the impression that there's quite a shoving match going on up there. But a pair of true friends is careful right from the outset not to grow overly thick branches in each other's direction. The trees don't want to take anything away from each other, and so they develop sturdy branches only at the outer edges of their crowns, that is to say, only in the direction of 'non-

friends.' Such partners are often so tightly connected at the roots that sometimes they even die together.

As a rule, friendships that extend to looking after stumps can only be established in undisturbed forests. It could well be that all trees do this and not just beeches. I myself have observed oak, fir, spruce, and Douglas fir stumps that were still alive long after the trees had been cut down. Planted forests, which is what most of the coniferous forests in Central Europe are, behave more like the street kids I describe in chapter 27. Because their roots are irreparably damaged when they are planted, they seem almost incapable of networking with one another. As a rule, trees in planted forests like these behave like loners and suffer from their isolation. Most of them never have the opportunity to grow old anyway. Depending on the species, these trees are considered ready to harvest when they are only about a hundred years old."

What Wohlleben describes here is an arboreal version of the story that Kropotkin told about animals in the first two chapters of *Mutual Aid*. Trees of similar species bonded together, physically or through mycelial intermediaries (we'll come onto those later), in order to support each other, this common life or "superorganism" being the means for the survival of ALL the trees (like ants in an ant colony or bees in a hive or nest) in a world in which "every tree for themselves" spells the death of the forest every bit as much as every last ant or bee or would be doomed on its own. Since trees, as far as we know, do not have the power of conscious, reflective thought, we must assume that this pattern of behaviour is a wild endowment, a feature of their life, and of being alive, itself.

This certainly seems to be the case when we read the book *Brilliant Green: The Surprising History and Science of Plant Intelligence*. Plant intelligence? Yes, plant intelligence. Plants

(and, in fact, EVERYTHING) are intelligent. It is not just some human quality the things at the top of a wholly narcissistic and imaginary “hierarchy of life” have been endowed with (we’ll come onto this later too). So let’s look at plants in a new light, putting crusty old thinking which wants to hierarchicalise and classify life out of our mind. Let’s start by getting the obvious out of the way. Plants are not built like animals. They are sessile (they can’t move from one place to another and so can’t run away from danger, for example), they don’t have individual organs like animals do and they are not built in the same way that animals are. They are modular and divisible where animals are neither. All these facts are linked due to the different situation of plants as opposed to animals. Plants are made to suit a plant form of life and animals are made to suit an animal form of life. This should make sense because it is a good idea to be suited to what you are and its conditions of existence. After all, your life depends on it (and perhaps others too)!

So we need to forget about “hierarchies of life” or charts made by humans which rate plants as barely anything above “stuff” — and with humans as the pinnacle (and the point) of life itself. This is nonsense and, frankly, bullshit too. Plants, it turns out when you actually study them, are both amazing and highly complex (and cooperative) organisms. (They are so complex, in fact, that we don’t even understand a lot of how they are doing what they are doing.) Far from being the basically passive green stuff that is apt to be ploughed up, ripped out or cut down when in the way of arrogant human development, plants are a vast network of life itself every bit as precious as our own (and, as I have already said, a form of life which is absolutely vital for our own existence). It turns out, in fact, that plants have the abilities demonstrated in all 5 human senses (that is, they have their own versions of sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell) as well as at least 15 other sensing capabilities to boot (for things like gravity, electromagnetic fields and the chemical composition of the ground they find themselves in). Plants can sense and adapt

themselves to forces we, in our puny human skin, cannot even sense with our physical bodies. It is as well then to note, as the authors of *Brilliant Green* do, that "there are not more-and less-evolved organisms; from the Darwinian point of view, all living beings now populating the earth are at the end of their evolutionary branch—otherwise, they would be extinct." (Meanwhile, Darwin himself, who was a botanist of note in his own right, said of plants that "It has always pleased me to exalt plants in the scale of organised beings.")

Tempting as it is to regard plants as just "dumb green stuff", then, we must instead ask intelligent questions about them (which, as is all part of my wicked plan, is going to educate us more about life itself). Such a question is asked by the authors of *Brilliant Green*: "How is it possible that living beings that are unintelligent, without social aptitudes, and incapable of relating to their environment, have survived and evolved on the planet?" If plants were just passive green stuff that was just "there" then, having no intelligence, friends or allies in the world, just inert bits of stem, twig and vegetable matter, they would surely have been destroyed by changing environments millions of years ago? Yet here we are with them at around 80% of the biomass of the planet. Simple logic suggests plants must have some skills and strategies by which they survive. Here we need to recall that, like us and every fluffy animal we think of as "real life", plants are ALIVE, growing and evolving too. They are active agents in their own progress through time. Plants must know a thing or two about survival, evolution and what it takes to stay alive. Their photosynthesis, which converts the sun into energy they can consume and, in turn, communicates that energy to us in our food, also creates the oxygen that we breathe (and, less benignly, has provided the fuel we've been burning at crazy rates for 300 years, threatening a mass extinction event of its own). Plants are what make life possible on earth. It might be instructive to learn more about them.

The first thing to learn is that each plant is really “a colony” as *Brilliant Green* puts it. Their bodies are modular and not based on having definitive organs which perform functions (which is why you can cut them down to ground level but they still come back). Plants breathe without lungs, see without eyes, nourish themselves without a mouth or a stomach. They even make decisions without having a brain. Plants, far from being individualistic passively existing entities, are “social organisms, sophisticated and highly evolved like us”. And WE have an “absolute, primordial dependence” on THEM. It is ironic, then, (or simply arrogant) that, for example, we talk about “vegetating” in disparaging terms — as if we were doing all the work and vegetation was doing nothing. Plants may be rooted to the spot but they sure aren’t doing nothing! In fact:

“*imagine being ‘reduced’ to immobility, or better yet, having chosen it as a useful evolutionary strategy, which already—as we have seen—is the case with plants. Wouldn’t it be even more important, then, for you to see, smell, hear, and generally explore the environment sensorially, since you couldn’t do so by moving around? The senses are indispensable instruments for life, reproduction, growth, and defense, which is why the plant world never dreamed of doing without them!*”

But if plants have senses then this MUST mean that they are able to utilise the data that they collect. This, after all, is what senses are, means to collect data about an environment that the organism uses to manipulate its existence. But if plants can act based on data collection, modulating, even changing, their behaviour according to the data they collect, then this is demonstrative of “typical intelligent behaviour” as we would define it if we found it in any animal being. We MUST conclude that plants have a plant form of intelligence but a form which is definitely intelligence properly so understood. Plants, in the regular processes of their operation, are “calculating risk and estimating

benefits" of forms of action based on the sensing of their surroundings in at least 20 (not just 5) different ways. They "plan and use resources to bring about future results." They particularly, for example, seem to use smell as a means of communication that can warn neighbours of danger and so can be said to experience stress and to respond to that stress by warning others about it (which might both result in aid for them and the ability of other organisms to better defend themselves). In this we see a plant recreation of Kropotkin's argument that life is about conflict and cooperation in equal measure. Or, as *Brilliant Green* puts it:

"*In nature, life is the result of an equilibrium continuously being recreated by the competition between predators and their prey. For every defensive manoeuvre plants mount against predators, there will always be a new animal strategy to which plants will respond in ever more sophisticated ways over time. This mechanism of continuous improvement is the mainspring for evolution and for all possibility of survival of life on Earth.*"

In such a world why would it be strange that plants learned to communicate? After all, we have no problem believing animals can using noises ranging from clicks and scratches through to hollering, screaming and human speech. So can you "Imagine a planet where plants have learned to communicate[?] In this imaginary world they can exchange information and even make themselves understood by animals, including the most complex animals, humans. On this planet, plants have learned to 'speak' with animals in their language and can argue persuasively to get the help they need." Yes? No? Well, of course, no need to imagine such a planet for you are living on it. Plants, in fact:

"*use an information network of other plants and certain animals to extend the reach of their explorations beyond their own organism. They know how to obtain small services and, when necessary, intervention from other species, especially when, unable to change their location, they must defend themselves from herbivorous predators. They also get help with reproducing and propagating themselves in the environment.*"

This is not just inter-species cooperation but cross-species cooperation, even cooperation of plants and animals (such as insects like ants) in a symbiotic form of life. As already mentioned in terms of the senses plants have, they can communicate outside themselves "by means of a real language, composed of thousands of chemical molecules which are released into the air or the water and contain various types of information". Plants can also communicate to neighbours below ground by touching roots or, above ground, by the way they position themselves in regard to their neighbours, something which suggests intelligently-realised coordinated activity (because why communicate unless you either want to warn something or engage it in some other relational understanding and how could you communicate at all without the intelligence communication requires?). Plant scientists have also noticed that "Plants interact at many levels and in their interactions exhibit different personalities" but also that they can recognise, and behave differently towards, familial relations (with whom, in an evolutionary sense, they are not in competition or conflict). We can show this latter fact by reference to an experiment that was carried out, related to us in *Brilliant Green*:

"*In 2007, a simple but important study shed light on this type of familial behavior. The experiment consisted of growing thirty seeds from the same plant in one pot, and in a second pot, identical to the first, growing thirty seeds from different plants. Observing the behavior of the young specimens growing in the two pots led to the discovery of several*

evolutionary mechanisms formerly thought to be present only in animals. The thirty plants from different mothers behaved as expected, developing a greater number of roots in an attempt to dominate the territory and assure themselves sufficient food and water, to the disadvantage of the other plants. But the thirty plants from the same mother, though they too found themselves coexisting in a restricted space, produced many fewer roots, advantaging the plants' aerial growth. In their case, what was observed was noncompetitive activity linked to their genetic proximity. This was a fundamental discovery: it replaced the traditional view that plants would adopt a stereotypical and repetitive mechanism (neighboring plant = necessity for defense and competition for territory) with a much more complex estimation that takes into account different factors, including genetic kinship. The plant, it turns out, checks out a potential rival before attacking or defending, and if it discovers a genetic affinity, instead of competing it chooses to cooperate."

Competition and cooperation, conflict and mutual aid, we see our two poles from Kropotkin's analysis again here but based on the intelligent recognition of familial friends as opposed to stranger foes.

But when we talk about plant communication we need to get right down into the dirt that they grow in and ask what is going on down there, normally unseen by human eye or really any other kind of eye. Its worth quoting *Brilliant Green* at length on this:

"*It's a fairly common misconception that the soil is an inert substrate; on the contrary, the soil is a living and densely populated environment. Microorganisms, bacteria, fungi, and insects form a special ecological niche that stays in equilibrium because of communication and collaboration with plants.*

One very common instance is that of the mycorrhizae (from the Greek mykes, "fungus," and rhiza, "root")—special forms of symbiosis occurring in the subsoil between the vegetative part of fungi that we commonly eat or see in the woods, and the roots of many species of plants. In certain cases, the fungus forms a sort of sleeve around the plant, penetrating inside its cells. This kind of symbiotic association is called 'mutualistic' because it's useful to both living organisms: the fungus provides the roots with mineral elements, including phosphorus (always hard to find in adequate amounts in the soil), and in exchange receives some of the sugars produced by the plant through photosynthesis, which it uses as a source of energy.

But in this relationship, which seems so convenient, there can be some rude surprises. The problem is that not all fungi have collaborative and peaceful intentions: some are pathogens and will attach to the root to get nourishment, destroying it in the process. So the plant needs to be able to distinguish what type of fungus is attempting to come into contact with it, and act accordingly. But how can it tell a friendly fungus from an enemy? Recognition results from a real chemical dialogue between the fungus and the root, which exchange signals to clarify their respective intentions. If the plant perceives that fungi have hostile designs, it will initiate hostilities. On the other hand, if after proper introductions it recognizes that this is a well-intentioned mycorrhizal fungus, then it will allow this symbiotic relationship which is so useful to them both to be established."

Conflict and mutual aid once more! But consider the consequences of this further example:

"*Another example of mutually beneficial symbiosis based on plant communication is the relationship between legumes and nitrogen-fixing bacteria. Along with a few others, these*

microorganisms have a capacity that's extraordinarily useful to living things: they fix atmospheric nitrogen, transforming it into ammonia (NH3) by breaking the tight bond between the two atoms making up a molecule of gaseous nitrogen (N2).

Nitrogen is the principal element of a soil's fertility (which is why many fertilizers are based on nitrogen compounds), and although the air we breathe is 80 percent gaseous nitrogen, this gas is inert and cannot be utilized by plants or any other living beings, except a few microorganisms such as these same nitrogen-fixing bacteria. These bacteria, as we were saying, transform gaseous nitrogen into forms of nitrogen, such as ammonia, that are easily absorbed by plants. In effect, they're natural fertilizers! In return, the bacteria find inside the roots an ideal growing environment and sugars in abundance—another tale of mutual benefit, again based on communication and recognition. Not all bacteria, in fact, are welcomed by plants; many are frightful pathogens against which plants construct unassailable barriers. Nitrogen-fixing bacteria, before being welcomed, initiate a long and complex chemical dialogue with the roots. This 'conversation' unfailingly begins with the release of a signal from the bacteria that's like a password, called NOD factor (nodulation, or nod factor), whose recognition by the plant is the first step in the plant's granting the bacteria free entry to the root.

Examples of symbiosis like the one just described are all based on close communication between the symbionts (as the two partners in symbiosis are called—in our example, the bacteria and the legume) and couldn't occur if collaboration between living organisms were not a long-established practice. In fact, these phenomena aren't confined exclusively to the plant world or lower organisms. On the contrary, some of these symbiotic relationships have become so established and important that they're the basis of our own life.

Let's look at an example: Mitochondria are the energy centers of our cells (or rather, of all animal and plant cells). Without these organelles situated within each cell, the existence of higher forms of life would be inconceivable. Well, recent studies suggest that mitochondria, too, are the result of symbiosis; in this case, symbiosis between the cells and primitive bacteria endowed with a powerful oxidative metabolism (in other words, capable of producing energy). The bacteria and the cells enter into a symbiosis which benefits them both (the bacteria produce energy for the cell, and in return obtain everything they need to survive), and at a certain point the bacteria are incorporated into the cells. There's a great deal of evidence to support this theory of the symbiotic origin of mitochondria. First of all, the mitochondrion exhibits many of the characteristics typical of bacteria, including a membrane very similar to theirs; then—again like bacteria—it has a closed, circular, double-helical DNA; and finally—and this is the most important evidence—like bacteria, mitochondria replicate independently of the organism that contains them. Several studies have clarified the fundamental importance that these formerly symbiotic cells have had in the evolution of complex forms of life. Symbiotic relationships thus are fundamental for all forms of life on the planet, and for our own existence."

This takes us considerably beyond what Kropotkin was talking about, extending the idea of mutual aid into the necessary symbiosis of life itself and the regular cooperation of separate elements or kinds of life as a matter of every day existence. *Brilliant Green*, in fact, details several examples of how ecosystems form, adapt and work together across multiple species of life to support themselves IN COMMON by processes of symbiosis and mutual aid as Kropotkin would have described it. This even extends to cases where various kinds of plant could formerly work together to defeat threats before human intervention then took away that ability from them, for example, as in kinds of corn that could defend themselves against a type of insect which laid its larvae in the roots, killing

the young plants, by secreting a substance which attracted small worms called nematodes (who destroyed the larvae). Various kinds of corn lost this natural ability to defend themselves, no doubt evolved over millennia, because human genetic engineers came along and altered the corn to increase its yield (human intervention usually revolves around some particular economic interest's profit margin). Unfortunately, they combined types that couldn't defend against the effects of the particular insect affecting them, leading to lost crops worth hundreds of millions. In addition, the human response to the threat was tons of insecticides spread into the atmosphere, all to solve a problem nature had solved itself but which ignorant, meddling, acquisitive human beings had recreated all over again in their selfish attempts at profit creation.

If only humans would have left the corn alone to develop in its ecosystem naturally as a wild form of life. Everything would then have found its natural relationships, worked out the unique consequences of its own situation, and balance would have been maintained. The fact, in fact, that the wild is itself a system, a whole, of which the things in it are only parts, is itself instructive in terms of mutual aid for can we not say that, around these poles of conflict and mutual aid, life prospers itself in general? Is this not how all life has come to be as it is? It seems to me that, actually, when we start thinking about big subjects like this we need to reassess how we have understood life itself in general, across all examples of it, to re-evaluate what makes it what it is. A beginning should be made here by realising that "intelligence" is not a feature of one species — the humans — but a PROPERTY OF LIFE ITSELF IN ALL ITS FORMS. So, as is said in *Brilliant Green*:

"*Intelligence is a property of life, something that even the humblest single-celled organism must possess. Every living being is continuously called upon to solve problems that essentially aren't so different from the problems we face. Think about it: food, water,*

shelter, companionship, defense, reproduction—aren't they the underlying factors in our knottiest problems? Without intelligence there can be no life. Accepting this plain truth shouldn't trouble us: the intelligence of human beings is obviously much greater than that of a bacterium or a unicellular alga. But the fundamental point is that this difference is only quantitative, not qualitative."

This leads to the conclusion that, in plants, "cognition and bodily functions are not separate but are present in every cell: a real, living example of what artificial intelligence scientists call an 'embodied agent,' that is, an intelligent agent that interacts with the world with its own physical body." Plants, in fact, are more like "living Internet networks" than they are like us, both within their own structures and in the relationships that reach out (literally) to others as in the case of roots or involvement in mycorrhizal networks. In plants, in fact, "millions of root tips (are) working in a network so that the destruction or predation even of an important part doesn't compromise the network's survival. By itself, one root tip doesn't have great calculating capacity, but together with the other root tips it is capable of extraordinary feats, just like an ant, which cannot map out strategies on its own, but by working with other ants creates a society that's among the most complex and structured in nature." Where in ant societies separate ants (although its not as simple as this as ant experts would tell you) work together to achieve vast ant cities, in plants the root tips, cells and pathways within the plant are sets of relationships which, through cooperation, achieve great feats of survival and the overcoming of daily crises the plant must detect and respond to in order to thrive and grow. How could it do this if it was stupid or alone or unable to organise both itself and relationships with others?

The fact is that, in the matter of life generally:

1. It is intelligent.

2. It is self-organising.

3. It engages significantly in mutual aid or cooperation in order to achieve its survival.

These statements apply ACROSS THE BOARD, from plants to animals and from colonies down to cells. These are the rules of the game of life. But don't just take my word for it. Consider, for example, Stephen Harrod Buhner's book *Plant Intelligence and the Imaginal Realm*. Here the fourth chapter, "Everything is Intelligent", begins by bemoaning the fact that human beings, led by Westerners, of course, who took the culturally dominant place in creating scientific discourse, taught "some sort of descending pyramidal hierarchy with people at the apex and so on down". Buhner describes this, from a science perspective as much as anything else, as "pretty stupid". He contradicts this outdated, social class-based thinking of the late Victorians by saying that "The foundational problem with that view is that all living organisms, it turns out, are self-organized and all of them show emergent behaviors." "Emergent behaviors" are behaviours that cannot be discovered by examining the parts of systems of relationships for they only emerge (hence "emergent") when things act together in concert in and amongst the relationships. (A common example here is the vast flocks of birds which can rise and swoop together without all crashing into each other.) That is to say they are properties of working together in cooperation. A reductionist mentality (which has been much of what science has been about and continues to be about to the present day) cannot help here in describing what is going on for that method is simply unable to understand it appropriately.

So, as Buhner says, “Unfortunately for reductionists, one of the ‘interesting’ behaviors that arise in complex systems, once biological self-organization occurs is —always— intelligence in the system.” But another way we can say this, as Buhner does, is that “the older, more mechanical view of the world” is itself outdated and obsolete. The mechanical model does not explain the necessity for self-organisation and intelligence that living things MUST have, simply by virtue of having life and being alive, in order to survive. We can even talk this way about anonymous “molecules” and so:

“*when a container is packed with increasing numbers of molecules, at a certain point, which can never be predicted, the random motions of the billions and billions of molecules will suddenly show a sudden alteration in behavior, all of them will spontaneously synchronize. The molecules begin to move and vibrate together. They begin acting in concert, actively cooperating, and become tightly coupled together into one, interacting whole exhibiting a collective, macroscopically ordered state of being. They become a unique living system of which the smaller subunits (the molecules) are now only a part. At such a moment, the molecules have combined into a system that is self-organized. A phase change occurs. Something more than the sum of the parts has come into being. And … it just happens.*”

This is not saying that things can act together, it is saying that, at a certain always indefinable point, things just do act together — like water that suddenly becomes ice or steam. Relationships between even molecules, let alone anything alive, have connections between them which affect everything so entangled in them and change their behaviour and even their form. It is in this context that Buhner quotes Goethe in the quote I used to head this chapter:

"*Life as a whole expresses itself as a force that is not to be contained within any one part... The things we call the parts in every living being are so inseparable from the whole that they may be understood only in and with the whole.*"

Buhner then understands living things as inevitably, necessarily, self-organising things. And this self-organisation itself mandates intelligence — for such organisation requires the ability to do this in ways which both avoid danger (from changing moment to changing moment) and promote growth (growth is still really the only definition of being alive that humans have come up with). Let's listen in on Buhner himself discussing this for some extended moments:

"*In order to maintain the self-organized state, the living entity that comes into being in that moment—the thing that is more than the sum of the parts, of necessity—must immediately develop mechanisms for analyzing two things: inflows from the exterior world toward the me that now exists (exteroceptive inputs) and the functional state of the parts that have self-organized to make up the whole (interoceptive inputs). Failure to analyze the inflows can result in death, i.e., the loss of self-organization. As well, dysfunction of any of the parts can also lead to loss of self-organization.*

This is why every part matters to the whole. Remove the lungs, liver, and pancreas and whether or not you have a brain becomes irrelevant. Remove the plants, the forests, the waters and whether or not you have scientists or opposable thumbs becomes irrelevant.

Inflows from the exterior world, from not me toward me, have of necessity to be understood. Their nature—but more importantly their intent—has to be determined, and once that occurs a response to the inflow has to be crafted. By all useful definitions of the

term this is intelligent behavior; it is also the way dictionaries such as Merriam-Webster's define it … 'The ability to learn or understand or to deal with new or trying situations [or] the ability to apply knowledge to manipulate one's environment.'

Interestingly, the word, intelligence, comes from the Latin phrase inter legere —it means, simply, 'to choose.' And, in fact, a crucial additional, and almost-always-overlooked, aspect of intelligence in living systems is that they possess the capacity to innovate behavior, that is, to generate unique solutions to the environmental challenges that face them. They have the ability, as the Latin root of the word indicates, to choose. The comparative zoologist Richard Lewontin describes it like this ...

'Much of the uncertainty of evolution arises from the existence of multiple possible pathways even when external conditions are fixed. It is a prejudice of evolutionists who give adaptive explanations of the features of organisms that every difference between species must be a consequence of different selective forces that operated on them... Populations subject to identical selective conditions may arrive at quite different evolutionary endpoints, so that the observation that two species differ is not prima facie evidence that they were adaptively differentiated.'

Thus, if you take two plants, same genus and species, and plant them in identical environments... they will end up at slightly, or sometimes very, different places. Their leaf patterns, chemical structure, and dynamic interactive interface with their surrounding environment will not be the same. Faced with the same environmental pressures, each will choose slightly, or very, different responses—from a large number of possible choices—to those environmental pressures. And what they choose, and in consequence what happens afterward, can't be predicted. As Lewontin goes on to say, 'The characteristic of a living

object is that it reacts to external stimuli rather than being passively propelled by them. An organism's life consists of constant mid-course corrections.'

'Mid-course corrections.' That is the capacity of a living organism—and that includes everything from viruses to human beings—to choose among multiple effective options in response to incoming environmental pressures. It is in fact indicative not only of the capacity to choose but also, most distressingly for reductionists, of free will. In other words, every living organism on this planet (including such self-organized systems as the white blood cells in our bodies) has the capacity to analyze the nature of outside forces that touch them, determine their intent, and then to exercise judgment in determining from among a number of potential responses which one to implement. That this is true, and has been known to be true for a very long time, does nothing to stop the extreme discomfort engendered by saying it out loud. Most people, including the majority of scientists, have been taught that human beings are somehow innately different from the other organisms on this planet… nevertheless we are not...

We are different only in the specific ecological functions we serve—just as every living organism is—but we are not different in our underlying capacities from the other life-forms on this planet. And that most definitely includes intelligence. Our intelligence is only a special instance of a general condition.

When researchers in the late nineteenth and much of the twentieth century began examining the world for intelligent life-forms, they, regrettably but understandably, used themselves as a template for finding it. Perhaps that is why they have had such trouble finding it... Just sayin'…

They began judging all life-forms by human norms. In other words, they looked for language that seemed like our own, tool making that seemed like our own, social organization that seemed like our own. They rather insistently projected a human-centric orientation onto the exterior world. Any organism that had some of the human attributes they deemed indicative of (human) intelligence was accorded more value than those organisms that appeared to have less. Or, from another frame of reference, they were using as a measuring stick the concept of the evolutionary pyramid or escalator. Specifically: 'We emerged from the primordial ooze and slowly we turned, step by step, and in a world red in tooth and claw, we crawled up out of the clinging slime. By dint of our superior intelligence, we rose to the top of the evolutionary pyramid, the supreme life-form on this planet. Finally, from a heaving sea of blind, striving life-forms, each struggling for continued existence, awareness emerged. (The Earth, nay, even the Universe itself, did thus become conscious of itself.) And we stood on the pinnacle of our greatness, alone, looking out at the great void of the universe wondering, 'Is there anybody else out there?'' Or as Robert Heinlein once put it ...

'Man is a rationalizing animal not a rational one.'

And, as it happened, scientists, looking out at the void, did notice some sophisticated (human-like) attributes in some other life-forms. Dolphins seem pretty smart and chimpanzees, too. Then dogs maybe, or parrots...

Still, those early researchers, standing on the pinnacle of their greatness, were, in their own fashion, finding that intelligence in one form or another was an attribute of the living organisms they were studying. Whether it was the discovery that prairie dogs have a complex language; that in fact they describe the movement of other animals through their territory in great detail, including, if those animals are humans, distinctions in the color of

their clothes; or the finding that chimpanzees can sign up to 350 words (and even invent their own words for objects they haven't been taught words for) and then teach the ability to use sign language to their offspring; or that their memory is better; or the discovery that dogs can add and subtract, or that ravens make tools, or that dung beetles navigate by the stars, or that amoeba farm bacteria for food, or that crocodiles and alligators design and use tools to more easily capture water birds, or that elephants can learn to speak human language, or that dolphins use nonlinear mathematics in seeking and finding their food, examination of the living organisms around us continually reaffirms that intelligence is an attribute of living systems—even when using humans as the yardstick for measurement.

Nevertheless, despite this, there remains, among most researchers and nearly all nonresearchers, the belief that humans are the only organisms with real intelligence; dolphins may be as smart as us from that frame of reference (probably not) but chimpanzees are more properly thought of as much lower on the scale of evolution—in another million years they might think as well as us... maybe. But the other animals? They are much further back, much lower on the scale. Just because prairie dogs have made up specific prairie dog words for "fat guy with red shirt" doesn't mean they are intelligent. And besides, animals, even birds, are like us; they are very close behind us on the evolutionary escalator—compared with things like bacteria—and so have developed some rudimentary capacity to think—just not very well. If they were as advanced as us on the escalator they would think just like we do, but they are behind us, back there, on a lower step, a reminder of where we came from not so very long ago.

Or as Lynn Margulis (and Dorion Sagan) once put it, 'Our intolerant slogans continually denigrate the nonhuman life with which we share this planet.' But while the evolutionary escalator is an incredibly common expression of a belief in human exceptionalism, it doesn't

have any real basis in ecological reality. The view is one Darwin specifically rejected, which makes it all the more ironic that it is the neo-Darwinians that have spread it about so much. Darwin's own perspective, as the English philosopher Mary Midgley comments, is much different, he did 'not see evolution as an escalator, but as a sinuous, branching radiating pattern—not a staircase, but perhaps a bush or seaweed. Life-forms diverge from each other to meet particular needs in their various environments. Our own species figures then only as one among the many, with no special status or guarantee of supremacy. This notion has, however, always been found far less exciting than the escalator model, which has been enormously popular ever since it was promoted by Herbert Spencer, in spite of Darwin's own rejection of it and its evident complete irrelevance to this theory.'

The cerebral hypertrophy that so many reductionists celebrate as evidence of human superiority, that they insist puts us on the top of the evolutionary ladder, is in fact only a projection coming from their particular psychological orientation. In fact, as Midgley comments, the old picture of man's rise to dominance 'showed brain evolution dramatically as a series of successive conquests, in which at each level of life a new brain area and its faculties came in to rule the rest, culminating in man and final victory of the cerebral cortex, or some specially splendid part of it'... Detailed neurological work has, however, worn away almost every aspect of this seductive picture. As Stephen Walker, a neurological psychologist says, 'One still has a sense of regret that this charming and convincing tale must be discarded. The weight of evidence is now if anything more in favour of the unhelpful suggestion ... that all the fundamental parts of the vertebrate brain were present very early on, and can be observed in lampreys.'

Our brain is not especially unique, nor does it confer on us any special faculty not already present in the system from which it emerged. Nevertheless, brain chauvinism has

continually led to ridiculous 'utopian' projections like this one by molecular biologist William Day… '[Man] will splinter into types of humans with differing mental faculties that will lead to diversification and separate species. From among these types a new species, Omega Man, will emerge either alone, in union with others, or with mechanical amplifications to transcend to new dimensions of time and space beyond our comprehension.'

Or as the science-fiction writer Greg Bear once put it, 'we are now in charge of our own evolution.' As Midgley comments… 'world pictures like this are not primarily science. The science that is supposed to justify them is really a small part of their content. They are actually metaphysical sketches, ambitious maps of how all reality is supposed to work, guiding visions, systems of direction for the rest of our ideas.'

Everything in that frame is judged in terms of the human, as if we are outside the ecological matrix in which we are embedded, as if evolution ended once and for all with our emergence, with the development of our brains. And this kind of thinking has invaded nearly every aspect of human life. As Rupert Sheldrake puts it, 'The evangelists of science and technology have succeeded beyond the wildest dreams of the missionaries of Christianity.'

The trouble is that this worldview is not accurate to the world itself or to the findings of researchers in scores of fields. Unfortunately nearly everyone in the West believes significant aspects of it to be true. Our thinking has been corrupted by bad software, an inaccurate description of reality. In consequence, our experiences of ourselves, of the world, and many of our behaviors have been corrupted as well.

The widely disseminated picture of our human exceptionalism is grounded in the assertion that we possess a unique form of intelligence due to our unique, hypertrophic brain. But this belief is not true; it has become a kind of intellectual imperialism. It has been, and still is, used to denigrate the orientation that many people still experience, that the world, and the other organisms with which we share this Earth, are alive, intelligent, and aware. It has been used to stifle the response of the heart to what has been presented to the senses. This has resulted in the creation of a conceptual monoculture that can't see outside its limitations. Such imperialists have set out to conquer the superstitious natives inhabiting the dark continent, the place where the general populace lives. Midgley makes the point that arguments such as Day's rest in a belief in human beings as 'an isolated will, guided by an intelligence, arbitrarily connected to a rather unsatisfactory array of feelings, and lodged, by chance, in an equally unsatisfactory human body.' Or as Susan Sontag once described it: 'consciousness harnessed to flesh,' as if there could be consciousness without the emergence of the self-organized system we call the body. This type of dissociation is a common side effect of the materialist and very reductionist view of the world most of us are trained in. But as Midgley notes, this system of thought is not reason, not science, but behavioral examples of, as she puts it, an unexamined, 'exuberant power fantasy.' It is bad software, generated out of unexamined psychological frameworks.

The evolutionary escalator metaphor and the assumptions of what constitutes intelligence (and value) that are embedded within it create, automatically, behavior that is very dangerous to every other life-form on this planet—in fact to the health of every ecosystem this planet possesses.

We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them. The belief in our unique intelligence is, and always has been, a lie. And while this 'power

fantasy' is slowly eroding in the light of unavoidable animal intelligence—as Giorgio Samorini notes… 'Studies on animal behavior are providing ever more data in direct contradiction to behaviorism's rejection of animal mentality, and more and more scholars and researchers are distancing themselves from the behavioristic paradigm and beginning to admit the possibility of perceptive consciousness in animals.' — it is certainly not eroding when it comes to simple, non-brain-possessing life-forms such as viruses.

Nevertheless, intelligence emerges as an aspect of self-organization in living systems. Always. What is actually true is that once self-organization occurs the capacity for analysis, innovation, and response all occur contemporaneously. And the degree of intelligence in living organisms, irrespective of whether they have a 'brain' or not (or are an animal or not), is exceptional. This finding is beginning to pervade nearly every field of science, laying waste to the older paradigm. But most scientists are still very reluctant to accept what is becoming obvious. As Paul Davies comments...

'To date biology is rooted in the old physics, the physics of the nineteenth century. Newtonian mechanics and thermodynamics play the central role. More recent developments, such as field theory and quantum mechanics, are largely ignored. In spite of the fact that the molecular basis for life is so crucial, and that molecular processes are quantum mechanical, atoms are treated like classical building blocks to be fitted together. Distinctively quantum effects, such as nonlocal correlations, coherence, and phase information, let alone possible exotic departures from quantum mechanics as suggested above, are not considered relevant.'

Again: the degree of intelligence in living organisms, irrespective of whether they have a 'brain' or not (or are an animal or not), is exceptional, and examples abound. For instance,

the capacity to engage in mathematical computation and differentiation is common. As Richard Lewontin observes… 'In Cladocera, small fresh-water arthropods, reproduction remains asexual as long as conditions of temperature, oxygen dissolved in the water, food availability, and degree of crowding remain constant. Then, if a sudden change in these conditions occurs ... the Cladocera switch to sexual reproduction... The organisms are detecting a rate of change of an input, not its absolute value. They are performing mathematical differentiation.'

The capacity for mathematical analysis and differentiation is supposed to be limited to human beings. But it is not. You can also find it, sadly for reductionists, in slime mold. Jeremy Narby, in his book 'Intelligence in Nature', reveals that the 'slime mold, Physarum polycephalum, can consistently solve a maze... [W]hen food is placed at the start and end points of the maze, the slime mold withdraws from the dead-end corridors and shrinks its body to a tube spanning the shortest path between food sources. The single-celled slime solves the maze in this way each time it is tested.' Toshiyuki Nakagaki, the researcher conducting the study, commented that: 'Even for humans it is not easy to solve a maze. But the plasmodium of true slime mold, an amoeba-like organism, has shown an amazing ability to do so. This implies that an algorithm and a high computing capacity are included in the unicellular organism.'

This capacity for mathematical differentiation and computation is wide spread. All self-organized biological systems possess it."

Phew! That was a very large quotation (from what is not an inconsiderable book) but I hope you can see why it was necessary to make it? It establishes that intelligence and self-organisation, the intelligent possession and deployment of all kinds of relationships

internal and external, as precursors of phenomena such as the conflict and mutual aid which Kropotkin wanted to emphasise (especially the latter), are features of all life itself; they are functions life comes equipped with in order to even be life. Why is this? Because it would not make much sense to come to life but then not be equipped with any of the faculties, skills or abilities which ensured it didn't just blink out again in a second instant just as immediate as the first which created it. Life, in other words, is not some magic force which living things have but dead things have lost (a very mystical, psychical view) but a set of abilities to form and maintain relationships and forms of order in and from the apparent chaos which not only create life but also give it some ability to prolong itself and manipulate itself and/in an environment (i.e. produce some resilience). It is these abilities which lead on to the necessary ability of being able to join, work together with, and share with, others that form ecosystems of organisms that thrive and survive together both within species and even across them. This is to say that, ultimately, "mutual aid" as Kropotkin calls it is indeed something about life itself, something about how it self-organises in an intelligent way through the natural building of intelligently articulated relationships — in plants as well as animals; in all life, in fact.

Thus, we need to stop taking the world apart and looking at it as isolated bits and imagining that if we know how they fit together we have understood everything there is to understand and start appreciating that, actually, its intelligent relationships and self-organisation which is really what all life is; the ability to work one's life out for oneself, more often than not with others like us within the context of a greater whole IN A WILD. As Buhner says in another book, *The Secret Teachings of Plants*: "The entire system and all its parts are cooperative, not competitive. They make up one system. They are whole." Therefore, we can say that:

"*Self-organized systems are living identities that engage in continual communication, both internal and external. They are not isolated, static units that can be understood in isolation. To examine them in isolation kills the living entity itself, and paying attention to the thing and not its communications—its balance-initiated information exchange—reveals very little about the true nature of what is being studied.*"

Here the slightly hokey assertion "all things are one" is actually correct and life itself can meaningfully be understood as A SYSTEM OF INTELLIGENTLY-ARTICULATED, SELF-ORGANISING RELATIONSHIPS. Such a system, as the Earth itself is according to Lynn Margulis and James Lovelock, the progenitors of the Gaia Hypothesis, is about maintaining a balance of relationships, something only necessary if things, on the whole, cooperate in acts Kropotkin would have called "mutual aid". The meaning of this world, and the life as a whole that makes it up, is then in its relationships which constitute, in my view, a WILD ANARCHY, a model we may use metaphorically or analogically to our self-organising political purposes (just as Kropotkin did). To quote Goethe again: "Life as a whole expresses itself as a force that is not to be contained within any one part." We must look to its relationships, how things interact and cooperate together, how things are systems and not merely isolated things, the latter being things which in life are much more likely to suffer and/or die very quickly rather than to survive.

The thesis of this chapter is then that WILD NATURE IN ITS MANNER OF OPERATION IS ANARCHY. This is the wild nature that is intelligent, self-organising, cooperative regardless of necessary conflict, communicative and interactive in and with its environment. This is a wild nature that is necessarily about SOCIABILITY — whether between organisms or within them. I am saying that the anarchy we might imagine as "where we want to be" is this and so is where we actually already are even if, under the

scourge of hierarchical, anthropocentric, power hungry, thinking we have imagined ourselves to be somewhere else. The place we have imagined ourselves into or, under a dominating intellectual schema and its accompanying politics, have been imagined into, is the place Graeber and Wengrow described in *The Dawn of Everything* as a matter of our GETTING STUCK. Getting stuck, speaking politically, morally or intellectually, is where we do not want to be. That's when domination and exploitation rule the roost. Life, however, and wild nature in this analogy, are being imagined as sets of free-flowing, self-organising relationships which build together in order to maintain an equilibrium rather than a situation of domination and exploitation; they are relationships which are self-organising (and so which MUST BE LEFT TO SELF-ORGANISE). Wild nature is here being imagined, in a Stirnerite way, as a "union of egoists" that pursues mutually beneficial relationships yet without imagining that they must be permanent or that any structure is arbitrary. And we must remember always in this that NOTHING DESIGNED OR CONTROLS THIS SET OF RELATIONSHIPS. THEY ARE SELF-ORGANISING. THEIR SELF-ORGANISATION IS THE MEANING AND FUNCTION OF THEIR REALITY. They are autonomy, agency, association, affinity; they are decentralised and without a centre.

We must come to consider, then, that the fact that no power directs the wild and its relationships in an arbitrary, centralising way IS WHY IT WORKS. Nature is DECENTRALISED, can solve millions of problems all at once every day that are consequential to life and death, and it can do so *by being left to itself and the relationships it has itself created or denied*. This does not say much for the notion that complex systems need an authoritarian leader to work — for *the biggest systems we know of, completely wild and natural ones, need no such thing*. It is not control which gets things done; it is the decentralised, intelligent, self-organising cooperation of things which gets things done. Anarchy is written into the wild and therefore shows itself as that which prospers life

without centralising control. It turns out that anarchists, whether they knew it or not, were actually, for the most part, talking about the world that was always already all around them but in a context in which human beings had strayed from a natural course into one in which they wanted to be the top of a pyramid, the pinnacle of a hierarchy, the dominating force of nature: GOD. This is to misunderstand the wild entirely for it is a non-dominating system, a cooperative system which works together, all at once, or not at all. It is order and chaos at the same time. This is why humans actually threaten devastation of the planet — because if you attempt to control it then you attempt to destroy that which maintains it: the absence of such control. It is only as a self-correcting, self-organising equilibrium that life on earth either thrives or survives. This should be the model of our anarchy and, consequently, we should see organisation and chaos not as opposed concepts but as the same thing described in different ways (hence the title of this book). On the one hand, the wild is set upon sets of self-organising relationships doing what they do to prosper the life of a forest, an ant colony, a pride of lions or a single cell but, on the other, it is the chaos of a total lack of overarching control which is making sure that everything is “as it should be”. But, and here’s the insight we need to have, things do not need overarching control, they do not need centralising coercion. These self-organising relationships sort themselves, and the much bigger whole that they are a part of, out. Taught from birth that somebody must be in charge, we need to learn that things work out fine if nobody is in charge and things are left to organise themselves. Cooperation, sociality, symbiosis, mutual aid gets the job done all by itself. Or, to quote the *Daodejing*: “Doing nothing, nothing is left undone.”

9. Inventing Cultural Creations

"To imagine a sexual act that doesn't conform to law or nature is not what disturbs people. But that individuals are beginning to love one another — there's the problem."

(Michel Foucault)

Having discussed nature and the wild somewhat I now want to discuss culture, relations and transformation, particularly in terms of creating them. Culture is a part of nature's wild existence so this should not surprise anyone. So this is to be a chapter interacting with short pieces, and especially interviews, of and with the French philosopher of historical systems of thought, Michel Foucault, as contained in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* which is formally volume one of *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault*. My focus in interacting with the many pieces included in this book, not all of which I have interacted with by any means, is then to focus on an ethical approach to common life, life together, life "in relationship" that is creative of culture (particularly as that relates to, and involves, sexuality), which is of relevance to this book and which will form its own part of the whole discourse. About such subjects Foucault has much that is relevant to say and I have focused largely on interviews in this respect as they catch Foucault in a mode in which he is responding to questions unknown to him before they are asked and so, in answering them, he has to give expression to his ideas without being able to sit back, consider, organise his thoughts, etc. So the Foucault I interact with here is not the one who is presenting a project in literary form, a thesis, but the agile thinker who interacts authentically with others in an act of explanation and common understanding. My approach in this chapter will then be to go through several of these relatively short pieces in this book, drawing out ideas from what Foucault says and perhaps also adding in some

ideas of my own Foucault then inspires, before rounding up at the end what I think we have learned from this Foucauldian interaction.

The first piece I want to address is not an interview, however, but one of the pieces in the first part of the book which relates to the courses that Foucault taught at the Collège de France in Paris, where he worked, where he was required, on a yearly basis, to teach a lecture course for public consumption as part of his contract of employment. These courses often naturally track his publication history and so we find courses on the social formation of knowledge, punitive and psychiatric systems of thought, biopolitics, power, subjects and subjectivity, etc. The particular piece I want to begin by addressing is entitled "Society Must Be Defended" and, appropriately enough for the topic of this book of my own, it wants to discuss the formation and maintenance of societal relations and particularly in their relation to war.

Foucault begins this piece wanting to ask how we might go about analysing power relations, a subject with which he was habitually interested throughout his career. He writes:

"*In order to conduct a concrete analysis of power relations, one would have to abandon the juridical notion of sovereignty. That model presupposes the individual as a subject of natural rights or original powers; it aims to account for the ideal genesis of the state; and it makes law the fundamental manifestation of power. One would have to study power not on the basis of the primitive terms of the relation but starting from the relation itself, inasmuch as the relation is what determines the elements on which it bears: instead of asking ideal subjects what part of themselves or what powers of theirs they have surrendered, allowing themselves to be subjectified [se laisser assujettir], one would need to*

inquire how relations of subjectivation can manufacture subjects. Similarly, rather than looking for the single form, the central point from which all the forms of power would be derived by way of consequence or development, one must first let them stand forth in their multiplicity, their differences, their specificity, their reversibility: study them therefore as relations of force that intersect, interrelate, converge, or, on the contrary, oppose one another or tend to cancel each other out. Finally, instead of privileging law as a manifestation of power, it would be better to try and identify the different techniques of constraint that it brings into play."

The interesting aspect of this for me is "how relations of subjectivation can manufacture subjects" and so the fact that relations create their participants in their being related. In fact, how we think about relations (which is never fixed) does this too as calling the "juridical notion of sovereignty" a "model" suggests. All of these things suggest interpretation and so values that can articulate and manufacture such a thing. For Foucault, however, "force relations" suggest "war" as a model for understanding relations generally and so suggest the first order question: "How, since when and how, did people begin to imagine that it is war that functions in power relations, that an uninterrupted combat undermines peace, and that the civil order is basically an order of battle?" (This is actually the question that Foucault's public lecture course for that particular year set out to discuss.) This, of course, leads to the explanatory gloss of this question as "Who first thought that politics was war pursued by other means?" What follows is a very shortened form of one of Foucault's explanatory histories of the development of thought.

Foucault argues that, once upon a time, only certain people had the power to make war and that, gradually, these people withdrew "from the person-to-person, group-to-group relationship" in a social movement which gradually led to "state privilege" and the

creation of an official military apparatus so that “a society pervaded by warlike relations was slowly replaced by a state equipped with military institutions.” Foucault also argues that, funnily enough, at about this period in history a certain discourse began to appear which “makes war the permanent basis of all the institutions of power.” This was around about the seventeenth century. In this particular kind of discourse:

“*it was war that presided over the birth of states: not the ideal war imagined by the philosophers of the state of nature but real wars and actual battles; laws are born in the middle of expeditions, conquests, and burning cities; but war also continues to rage within the mechanisms of power — or, at least, to constitute the secret driving force of institutions, laws, and order. Beneath the omissions, illusions, and lies that make us believe in the necessities of nature or the functional requirements of order, we are bound to re-encounter war: it is the cipher of peace. It continuously divides the entire social body; it places each of us in one camp or the other. And it is not enough to find this war again as an explanatory principle; we must reactivate it, make it leave the mute, larval forms in which it goes about its business almost without our being aware of it, and lead it to a decisive battle that we must prepare for if we intend to be victorious.*”

What Foucault means here is that this mentality, this metaphor as a measure of understanding, creates certain relations between people. Of course, it is not a necessary metaphor (for what metaphor ever is?). But it has consequences. For example, as Foucault goes on to say, “The subject who speaks in this discourse cannot occupy the position of the universal subject.” They are themselves, not every “I”. They take a side and it is always their side. The “truth” they speak of, even if they imagine to feel they are trying to be fair in defining it, is always nevertheless “functioning as a privilege to be maintained or re-established... a truth that functions as a weapon.” “Universal truth and general right” are

here “illusions and traps”. A further example is that using war as a means of understanding is that “fury must account for harmonies” and “What is meant to serve as a principle of decipherment is the confusion of violence, passions, enmities, revenges; it is also the web of petty circumstances that decide defeats and victories.” Everything is a matter of the battle and winning the fight. And so:

“*at the beginning of history and law one will posit a series of brute facts (physical vigor, force, character traits), a series of chance happenings (defeats, victories, successes or failures of conspiracy, rebellions or alliances). And only above this tangle will a growing rationality take shape, that of calculations and strategies — a rationality that, as one rises and it develops, becomes increasingly fragile, more and more spiteful, more closely tied to illusion, to fancy, to mystification. So we have the complete opposite of those traditional analyses which attempt to rediscover, beneath the visible brutality of bodies and passions, a fundamental, abiding rationality, linked by nature to the just and the good.*”

What this results in, Foucault concludes, is “a historico-political discourse, a discourse in which truth functions as a weapon for a partisan victory, a discourse at once darkly critical and intensely mythical.” Discourses, of course, are modes of thinking that act as borders on thinking, replete with their own values, rhetorical moves and sets of possible agreements and disagreements.

Perhaps this is why Foucault himself refused to be a polemicist, a topic he addresses in the next piece I want to focus on, the interview titled “Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations”. Here the interview begins when Foucault is asked why he does not take part in polemics (polemic comes from a Greek word meaning “war”). Foucault finds it an ethical issue:

"*That's not my way of doing things; I don't belong to the world of people who do things that way. I insist on this difference as something essential: a whole morality is at stake, the morality that concerns the search for the truth and the relation to the other.*

In the serious play of questions and answers, in the work of reciprocal elucidation, the rights of each person are in some sense immanent in the discussion. They depend only on the dialogue situation. The person asking the questions is merely exercising the right that has been given him: to remain unconvinced, to perceive a contradiction, to require more information, to emphasize different postulates, to point out faulty reasoning, and so on. As for the person answering the questions, he too exercises a right that does not go beyond the discussion itself; by the logic of his own discourse, he is tied to what he has said earlier, and by the acceptance of dialogue he is tied to the questioning of the other. Questions and answers depend on a game — a game that is at once pleasant and difficult — in which each of the two partners takes pains to use only the rights given him by the other and by the accepted form of the dialogue.

The polemicist, on the other hand, proceeds encased in privileges that he possesses in advance and will never agree to question. On principle, he possesses rights authorizing him to wage war and making that struggle a just undertaking; the person he confronts is not a partner in the search for the truth but an adversary, an enemy who is wrong, who is harmful, and whose very existence constitutes a threat. For him, then, the game consists not of recognizing this person as a subject having the right to speak but of abolishing him, as interlocutor, from any possible dialogue; and his final objective will be not to come as close as possible to a difficult truth but to bring about the triumph of the just cause he has been manifestly upholding from the beginning. The polemicist relies on a legitimacy that his adversary is by definition denied."

Thus, how we address each other in our communications is not without its own consequences and prior commitments. The mode we use is no blank slate but a positionality, a relation. A mode of discourse, a kind of discourse, sets up a relation. Foucault goes on to talk about three models for polemics (religious, judicial and political) but for polemics the point always seems to be to determine "the intangible point of dogma" and so finding fault with someone already imagined to have been judged by it. Tellingly, Foucault says of polemics that "it isn't dealing with an interlocutor, it is processing a suspect." And so, "Polemics defines alliances, recruits partisans, unites interests or opinions, represents a party; it establishes the other as an enemy, an upholder of opposed interests against which one must fight until the moment this enemy is defeated and either surrenders or disappears." This is a long way away from "the serious play of questions and answers" with which Foucault has contrasted it. Polemics, Foucault charges, never produce new ideas (something in which he was interested) and, thinking about it, how could they? — for they exist only to conserve intellectual ground already established and now defended by the polemicist. In contrast, Foucault claims to want to draw out problems, ask the right (i.e. seemingly necessary and relevant) questions or to concern himself with "the development of a domain of acts, practices, and thoughts that seem to me to pose problems for politics."

This is a question, in the discursive positions Foucault contrasts, of if we set ourselves, as a distinctive "we" prior to debate, as the polemicist or the dogmatist or if we want to elaborate the necessary questions about the topic at hand in order to make the formation of a future "we" possible as a result of the debate. It will become clear why this matters in Foucault's mind as I discuss other interviews shortly. Here Foucault says that "it seems to me that the 'we' must not be previous to the question; [this] can only be the result — and

the necessarily temporary result — of the question as it is posed in the new terms in which one formulates it." Thus, he can assert:

"*I have never tried to analyze anything whatsoever from the point of view of politics, but always to ask politics what it had to say about the problems with which it was confronted. I question it about the positions it takes and the reasons it gives for this; I don't ask it to determine the theory of what I do.*"

Foucault was essentially a scholar who wanted to investigate how discourses on numerous topics came to be, what was active in their formation, how they worked, what for and what their effects were. This could be applied to scientific domains, political structures or moral practices. Thus, he was interested in what constituted a knowledge about a subject, structure or practice, how this was articulated and the role of it as an authority. Of course, all of this also applies in regard to asking what kinds of relationships such things could or would create as well. Foucault describes himself in his work as articulating:

"*the establishment of a certain objectivity, the development of a politics and a government of the self, and the elaboration of an ethics and a practice in regard to oneself. But each time I also tried to point out the place occupied here by the other two components necessary for constituting a field of experience. It is basically a matter of different examples in which the three fundamental elements of any experience are implicated: a game of truth, relations of power, and forms of relation to oneself and to others.*"

As part of explaining to his interviewers what it is he sees himself as doing in his intellectual work he says, "Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion

by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem." Foucault, then, does not so much want to address the history of human thought from the position of a partisan as from the position of someone who wants to identify problems so that it may be possible to change things in order to remove them. In elucidating this difference, he has inadvertently shown up that how we relate ourselves to ideas creates relationships with them and, in our materiality, with others as well.

Next I consider Foucault's interview in 1982, in Canada, by Stephen Riggins for the publication *Ethos*. Riggins begins by asking Foucault about silence and particularly how relations between people that contain a lot of silence are different to ones that don't. This develops into a discussion of various cultures (of relationships) and their various cultural differences (there being more and less "silent" cultures, for example) and here Foucault, who lived in different countries at the start of his career, remarks that: "we very often have the experience of much more freedom in foreign countries than in our own. As foreigners we can ignore all those implicit obligations which are not in the law but in the general way of behaving. Secondly, merely changing your obligations is felt or experienced as a kind of freedom." As someone who has lived in multiple different countries in their life so far, I feel the correctness of this statement in my bones. Relationships between people in, say, Germany and the UK, for example, do not feel at all similar but quite different, not only in terms of relative freedom but also in terms of social connection. It is interesting, in this respect, to consider Foucault's comment, in relation to being asked why he chose to become a philosopher (he says that he did not), that "Knowledge is for me that which must function as a protection of individual existence and as a comprehension of the exterior world. I think that's it. Knowledge as a means of surviving by understanding." I always personally find it a very revealing question to ask "What is it you know?" because it exposes what you think knowing is, what you think you

know about, how you think you know, etc., all these ancillary questions which reveal the working of a human mind and what is imagined to stand fast for it. This is actually what Foucault does in his work for he uncovers people's thinking and reveals what it is they think they know and that they have set it up as "knowledge", an authority, something by which they articulate and organise life and relationships, and perhaps quite differently from one another — as the world beyond keeps moving.

This brings us to "the economics of sexual behaviour in our society", a subject Foucault studied in the final years of his life which gave us his now 4 volume *History of Sexuality*, a revelatory work on how at least some societies have thought about sex over millennia. One notable facet of this work is that Foucault denies that sexual expression had simply been repressed for he diagnoses a counter-movement which is the increase of discourse about sex all the better to control it. Thus, "repression is always a part of a much more complex political strategy regarding sexuality." In this connection he can speak about "the economics of sexual behaviour in our society" and detail newly found "problems" such as child masturbation or "hysterical women" (of which there was a glut in the nineteenth century and which often apparently required male doctors to masturbate said women as a "cure"). All of this highlights complex kinds of relationships, between parents and children, between officials and populations, between people and their neighbours, and their interactions based on ever newly-formed knowledges which act as coercions and justifications to certain relationships between them. Your young son touching his penis regularly can, for example, be regarded as quite innocent and non-problematic but if someone tells you it is morally or medically defective then suddenly you may come to view it as something you need to correct or discipline. That "knowledge" has had the effect of changing your relationship to your son whereas, in former times, it may not even

have been identified as a problem (which results in a quite different relationship). Here Foucault comments:

"*Everyone knows very well that it's impossible to prevent a child from masturbating. There is no scientific evidence that it harms anybody. [Laughs] One can be sure that it is at least the only pleasure that really harms nobody. Why has it been forbidden for such a long time then?*"

Thinking about sexuality more generally (this interview was conducted in the middle of Foucault's sexual research which ran from 1976 to his death in 1984), Foucault responds to a question about "sex and reproduction" being subjects of the time with the suggestion that, in current times (the early 1980s), sexuality had been decoupled from reproduction and that, instead, "It is your sexuality as your personal behaviour which is the problem." Foucault's usual go to example in these types of discussion was homosexuality (not least because he was himself gay) and he uses it here as an example of what he means too. Here he argues, for instance, that:

"*It is very interesting to see that, before the nineteenth century, forbidden behavior - even if it was very severely judged - was always considered to be an excess, a 'libertinage,' as something too much. Homosexual behavior was only considered to be a kind of excess of natural behavior, an instinct that is difficult to keep within certain limits. From the nineteenth century on, you see that behavior like homosexuality came to be considered an abnormality. When I say that it was libertinage, I don't say that it was tolerated. I think that the idea of characterizing individuals through their sexual behavior or desire is not to be found, or very rarely, before the nineteenth century. 'Tell me your desires, I'll tell you who you are.' This question is typical of the nineteenth century.*"

Homosexual sex, then, in this interpretation, was not an “abnormality”, it was simply something which went too far, a surfeit of sexual desire. Yet, from this, it morphed into something which could suddenly become an abnormality of character, something which defined you, an identity, something that was indicative of what you were. That, as I’m sure you will agree, is a huge epistemological change, something which changes not only how we regard each other but, consequently, the relationships between us. Yet, it seems to me, that Foucault himself does not shy away from the former definition for, in being asked about his relationship to pleasure, he describes it as something that must be “incredibly intense”. He even speaks about pleasure being something so intense that you could die from it. Yet here we come into the territory that really appeals to me in regard to Foucault for, being asked about the point of his work and its relationship to the arts, he replies that his work is about “transforming yourself”.

Here Foucault voices his secret fear “that political power may destroy us” and in his interest in his own work as not to cultivate academic status but to facilitate his own transformation. This is to say that Foucault was carrying out his great and multiple works of intellectual genealogy in order to become changed. He calls it a “transformation of oneself by one’s knowledge” somewhat by analogy to a musician being changed by their music or an artist by their art. There are lots of people in the world who think OTHERS should be changed but rather less who see the task of life as to be CHANGING THEMSELVES. I take this as a sign, then, of Foucault’s personal integrity. He studies and writes because he imagines that his life and relationships to everything else depends on it. (In this, I am much the same and so you see my ten years of solid writing now behind me.) Foucault, in fact, calls this “ethics” — “if by ethics you mean the relationship you have to yourself when you act”. He links this back round to pleasure again when he adds that “The relationship that I think we need to have with ourselves when we have sex is an

ethics of pleasure, of intensification of pleasure." Further on, in answer to another question, he will add that "People have to build their own ethics, taking as a point of departure the historical analysis, sociological analysis, and so on that one can provide for them" and this is our first intimation that we should be consciously creative people, those active in the action of our own transformation as the previous "wild" chapter suggested.

It is this theme which is taken up in the interview titled "Friendship As A Way of Life" in *Le Gai Pied*, a French gay periodical whose name (which is a French play on the sound of words — "Gai Pied" {gay foot} sounds like "guêpier" which means "hornet's nest" and "trap" or "pitfall" figuratively speaking) was suggested by Foucault himself. Here the questions are more openly about sex and sexuality and Foucault can discuss questions about sexual relationships and culture more specifically. Here then, in questions which begin on the subject of the age range of the readership of the periodical itself, Foucault immediately diverts to the need to "distrust... the tendency to relate the question of homosexuality to the problem of 'Who am I?' and 'What is the secret of my desire?'" Foucault imagines that the issue here is "not to discover in oneself the truth of one's sex" but, instead, "to use one's sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships". Foucault follows this up by suggesting that "homosexuality is not a form of desire but something desirable". Thus, he suggests one can "work at becoming homosexuals", something he thinks tends developmentally towards "friendship". Thus, he constructs homosexuality as a material phenomenon "as a matter of existence" or, perhaps, co-existence — for he discusses this then as "how is it possible for men to be together? To live together, to share their time, their meals, their room, their leisure, their grief, their knowledge, their confidences? What is it to be 'naked' among men, outside of institutional relations, family, profession, and obligatory camaraderie?" This comes to be

about creative relationships and, thereafter, cultural practices for, in once more being asked about ages and age differences, he replies:

"*two men of noticeably different ages — what code would allow them to communicate? They face each other without terms or convenient words, with nothing to assure them about the meaning of the movement that carries them toward each other. They have to invent, from A to Z, a relationship that is still formless, which is friendship: that is to say, the sum of everything through which they can give each other pleasure.*"

As Foucault intimates, this expression of sexuality requires the complete invention of a relationship and way of acting toward one another. It is relationship OUTSIDE of the norm. It becomes an "immediate pleasure" and "it cancels everything that can be troubling in affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie, and companionship, things that our rather sanitized society can't allow a place for without fearing the formation of new alliances and the tying together of unforeseen lines of force." It pays no heed to the law or convention or normality or what the neighbours might think: it is transgressive, a new relationship based on the sharing of pleasure. Foucault comments on this memorably: "To imagine a sexual act that doesn't conform to the law or nature is not what disturbs people. But that individuals are beginning to love one another — there's the problem."

Here Foucault once more adverts to his self-transformatory agenda. He regards it as useful work to transform oneself into a certain type of person or to appear to have done so. He regards this (still speaking in homosexual context, of course) as "a homosexual askesis that would make us work on ourselves and invent — I do not say discover — a manner of being that is still improbable." He continues:

"*What we must work on, it seems to me, is not so much to liberate our desires but to make ourselves infinitely more susceptible to pleasure [plaisirs]. We must escape and help others to escape the two ready made formulas of the pure sexual encounter and the lovers' fusion of identities.*"

Foucault is talking about CREATING NEW RELATIONSHIPS of course, this interview's "friendship as a way of life". This is what I imagine the "wild relations" I am talking about in this book to be a version of as well. Foucault then wants to ask "How can a relational system be reached through sexual practices? Is it possible to create a homosexual (or, in my case, wild) mode of life? Of this, Foucault says:

"*This notion of mode of life seems important to me. Will it require the introduction of a diversification different from the ones due to social class, differences in profession and culture, a diversification that would also be a form of relationship and would be a 'way of life'? A way of life can be shared among individuals of different age, status, and social activity. It can yield intense relations not resembling those that are institutionalized. It seems to me that a way of life can yield a culture and an ethics. To be 'gay,' I think, is not to identify with the psychological traits and the visible masks of the homosexual but to try to define and develop a way of life.*"

In other words, "gayness" Foucault thinks can be defined by developing ways of living, types of friendship, certain ways of relating to each other (and are therefore never just arbitrary or static labels or innate essences). It can be about certain ways of loving one another too for there is no reason to think that love must be practiced in a single way and much less a dictated way, one that is not invented between lovers for themselves and the furtherance of their own pleasures. Foucault here notes, for example, that when women

are together they often actively brush each others' hair, do each others' make up or help to dress each other. They are not shy about touching or interpersonal contact. Foucault contrasts this with men who seem to see other men's bodies as off limits, causes of offence. Men touching men is a kind of taboo. It is in this respect that when men are forced together for long periods, such as in war or in prisons (or in my past writing on pirate ships), new relationships (scandalously) sometimes break out as moral and intellectual barriers are breached by human necessity.

But what does Foucault want to see here in this case? He describes, in his closing, the possibility of "a homosexual culture, that is to say, the instruments for polymorphic, varied, and individually modulated relationships." But this is not to be any dogmatic program. Programs quickly become dogmas and laws and what Foucault wants most of all is INVENTION. He says, "There ought to be an inventiveness special to a situation like ours and to these feelings." So "the program must be wide open". We must be able to imagine all the possible spaces that could be filled with the invention of new forms of relationship. We must ask "What can be played?" What is notable here is not only the invention necessary to this scenario but that it is a polymorphic invention. There is no sense here that, in any way, one type of relationship is, or should be, adequate to all situations. Rather the implication is as much diversity as necessary. Foucault is doing nothing less than advise that as many relationships, and types of relationship, should be invented as people can invent for the furtherance of their own pleasure and enjoyment and so to create the necessary cultural context for them in doing so.

In "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act", a further interview conducted with Foucault, he engages in a continuance of his interest in talking about the creation of a homosexual culture and

consciousness through the invention of social relations. Here an important early point is that:

"*Sexual behavior is not, as is too often assumed, a superimposition of, on the one hand, desires that derive from natural instincts, and, on the other hand, of permissive or restrictive laws that tell us what we should or shouldn't do. Sexual behavior is more than that. It is also the consciousness one has of what one is doing, what one makes of the experience, and the value one attaches to it. It is in this sense that I think the concept 'gay' contributes to a positive (rather than a purely negative) appreciation of the type of consciousness in which affection, love, desire, sexual rapport with people have a positive significance.*"

Yet a charge that was often laid against Foucault, most especially, of course, by those who had never read or listened to him and were his political opponents, was that he was a libertine. He wanted a sexual free for all. The secret fear was that nothing was off limits. (This was a time when gays were routinely accused, as trans people are today in exactly the same way, of wanting to sexually subvert your children.) In this interview, however, Foucault talks about "freedom of sexual choice" (which he differentiates from "freedom of sexual acts") as that about which we must be intransigent. What he thinks we need liberty in regard to is our sexual choices and whether we choose to manifest them or not. He does not say anyone should be free to act sexually in any way they decide (e.g. by deciding to become a rapist). So Foucault does NOT want a free for all and his ideas take place within an ethical framework.

What Foucault does find important here though, in a way reflected later in the very different anthropological and archaeological comments of Davids Graeber and Wengrow in their book *The Dawn of Everything*, is that:

"*the important question here, it seems to me, is not whether a culture without restraints is possible or even desirable but whether the system of constraints in which a society functions leaves individuals the liberty to transform the system. Obviously, constraints of any kind are going to be intolerable to certain segments of society. The necrophiliac finds it intolerable that graves are not accessible to him. But a system of constraint becomes truly intolerable when the individuals who are affected by it don't have the means of modifying it. This can happen when such a system becomes intangible as a result of its being considered a moral or religious imperative, or a necessary consequence of medical science.*"

Foucault, then, as Graeber and Wengrow would do almost 40 years later and as has been discussed in the previous chapter about life's natural endowments, speaks to the necessity of being able to self-organisingly change your relationships, particularly in their social and political consequences. Foucault does not conceive that a society without any restrictions would ever be possible but he thinks it is conceivably possible that, regardless of restrictions, people as a set of relations should have the ability and possibility to alter them to something more amenable to their own satisfaction. This seems "wild".

It turns out, in fact, in Foucault's own explanation of the history of sexual thought and practice under questioning, that he believes new cultures and practices are emerging, and developing, as a way to keep such evolving consciousness alive in any case. He advances the following hypothesis:

"In a civilization that for centuries considered the essence of the relation between two people to reside in the knowledge of whether one of the two parties was going to surrender to the other, all the interest and curiosity, the cunning and manipulation of people was aimed at getting the other to give in, to go to bed with them. Now, when sexual encounters become extremely easy and numerous, as is the case with homosexuality nowadays, complications are introduced only after the fact. In this type of casual encounter, it is only after making love that one becomes curious about the other person. Once the sexual act has been consummated, you find yourself asking your partner, 'By the way, what was your name?'

What you have, then, is a situation where all the energy and imagination, which in the heterosexual relationship were channelled into courtship, now become devoted to intensifying the act of sex itself. A whole new art of sexual practice develops which tries to explore all the internal possibilities of sexual conduct. You find emerging in places like San Francisco and New York what might be called laboratories of sexual experimentation. You might look upon this as the counterpart of the medieval courts where strict rules of proprietary courtship were defined. It is because the sexual act has become so easy and available to homosexuals that it runs the risk of quickly becoming boring, so that every effort has to be made to innovate and create variations that will enhance the pleasure of the act.

[Yes, but why have these innovations taken the specific form they have?]

Sexual relations are elaborated and developed by and through mythical relations. S&M [for example] is not a relationship between he (or she) who suffers and he (or she) who inflicts suffering, but between the master and the one on whom he exercises his mastery. What

interests the practitioners of S&M is that the relationship is at the same time regulated and open. It resembles a chess game in the sense that one can win and the other lose. The master can lose in the S&M game if he finds he is unable to respond to the needs and trials of his victim. Conversely, the servant can lose if he fails to meet or can't stand meeting the challenge thrown at him by the master. This mixture of rules and openness has the effect of intensifying sexual relations by introducing a perpetual novelty, a perpetual tension and a perpetual uncertainty, which the simple consummation of the act lacks. The idea is also to make use of every part of the body as a sexual instrument."

In Foucault's mind what matters to, what is the problem to, outsiders here, in the development of this particular sexual practice as the development of a sexual culture, is NOT what sex acts people are getting up to with each other but precisely "the gay lifestyle" itself or, in other words, that there even is "a gay lifestyle" that can be defined and distinguished over and against other forms of culture. Foucault, in response to a further question, clarifies this as, "talking about the common fear that gays will develop relationships that are intense and satisfying even though they do not at all conform to the ideas of relationship held by others. It is the prospect that gays will create as yet unforeseen kinds of relationships that many people cannot tolerate." Is it then that people must not be allowed to be different, to presume to create their own cultures through relationships that they have invented, perhaps without any reference to societal or cultural power relations at all? Foucault examples, in further conversation, the case of the military where "love between men can develop and assert itself in circumstances where only dead habits and rules were supposed to prevail."

In the interview "The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will" Foucault is at first addressed about "gay rights" and other kinds of sexual liberation. Here it is interesting that he does

not believe achieving “rights” can be the end of the story — and not only because “There can be discrimination against homosexuals even if such discriminations are prohibited by law.” It is also because we must go further and take matters into our own hands (the freedom to alter or invent relations he has previously discussed). Therefore, he adds:

“*It is therefore necessary to struggle to establish homosexual lifestyles, existential choices [des choix d’existence] in which sexual relations with people of the same sex will be important. It’s not enough as part of a more general way of life, or in addition to it, to be permitted to make love with someone of the same sex. The fact of making love with someone of the same sex can very naturally involve a whole series of choices, a whole series of other values and choices for which there are not yet real possibilities. It’s not only a matter of integrating this strange little practice of making love with someone of the same sex into pre-existing cultures; it’s a matter of constructing cultural forms.*”

I freely admit that its this “its a matter of constructing cultural forms” that is one of the underpinnings of my own discourse about “wild relations” and I see this, as I do with Armand’s amorous camaraderie, as one of the inspirations for it. Here, in answer to a follow up question where Foucault is told that things will always obstruct the creation of new ways of living, Foucault responds that this is precisely where, and why, there is something new to be done. He says:

“*That in the name of respect for individual rights someone is allowed to do as he wants, great! But if what we want to do is to create a new way of life [mode de vie], then the question of individual rights is not pertinent. In effect, we live in a legal, social, and institutional world where the only relations possible are extremely few, extremely simplified, and extremely poor. There is, of course, the relation of marriage, and the*

relations of family, but how many other relations should exist, should be able to find their codes not in institutions but in possible supports, which is not at all the case!"

Foucault's interlocutor here follows up by referring to executive control of people's relationships understood by means of institutions. But Foucault responds by speaking in favour of ever burgeoning kinds of new relations and to the detriment of institutions (and, by extension, their executive control):

"*We live in a relational world that institutions have considerably impoverished. Society and the institutions which frame it have limited the possibility of relationships because a rich relational world would be very complex to manage. We should fight against the impoverishment of the relational fabric. We should secure recognition for relations of provisional coexistence, adoption ...*

[Of children?]

Or — why not? — of one adult by another. Why shouldn't I adopt a friend who's ten years younger than I am? And even if he's ten years older? Rather than arguing that rights are fundamental and natural to the individual, we should try to imagine and create a new relational right that permits all possible types of relations to exist and not be prevented, blocked, or annulled by impoverished relational institutions."

In this spirit of invention Foucault's interviewer seems to see that the possibility for inventing new relationships and so new culture might spread beyond gay people themselves because "people want to direct their own lives and relationships" — and Foucault agrees with him here and talks about "a culture that invents ways of relating,

types of existence, types of values, types of exchanges between individuals which are really new and are neither the same as, nor superimposed on, existing cultural forms. If that's possible, then gay culture will be not only a choice of homosexuals for homosexuals — it would create relations that are, at certain points, transferable to heterosexuals." Thus, his view is not that diverse cultures (or sub-cultures) should be absorbed "into the general norm of social relations" — one imagines in a controlling and coercive way — but to say:

"*'Let's escape as much as possible from the type of relations that society proposes for us and try to create in the empty space where we are new relational possibilities.' By proposing a new relational right, we will see that non-homosexual people can enrich their lives by changing their own schema of relations.*"

In other words, once more Foucault wants people to be able to have the right to mould and invent their own socio-sexual relations. Foucault in fact seems to believe, based on his study of the history of sexual relations, that "the very recognition by the individuals themselves of (a self-conscious) type of relation, in the sense that they give them necessary and sufficient importance — that they acknowledge them and make them real – in order to invent other ways of life" IS SOMETHING NEW.

The last interview I want to consider in this chapter is "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity", an interview in which Foucault highlights once more his view of the need to create new (sexual) cultures with an appreciation of relationships, their consequences and dynamics. It is, in my view, perhaps the most powerful interview he ever gave in this respect and contains several noteworthy statements. The interview begins with Foucault

being asked about his distinction between “secret truths about one’s desire” and “constructing desire” itself. Foucault responds:

“*I think what the gay movement needs now is much more the art of life than a science or scientific knowledge (or pseudoscientific knowledge) of what sexuality is. Sexuality is a part of our behavior. It’s a part of our world freedom. Sexuality is something that we ourselves create — it is our own creation, and much more than the discovery of a secret side of our desire. We have to understand that with our desires, through our desires, go new forms of relationships, new forms of love, new forms of creation. Sex is not a fatality: it’s a possibility for creative life.*”

Wow. So it is not a matter of asserting a sexuality but of, as Foucault himself asserts as a clarification of this statement, creating that sexuality, becoming it. Foucault then regards sexuality not as a “secret of the creative cultural life” but as “a process of our having to create a new cultural life underneath the ground of our sexual choices.” Foucault then reiterates that “rights”, although important in terms of establishing a right to exist as what you claim to be in a societal context, are not enough and require pushing further to “stabilise” them. Foucault suggests that:

“*I think that one of the factors of this stabilization will be the creation of new forms of life, relationships, friendships in society, art, culture, and so on through our sexual, ethical, and political choices. Not only do we have to defend ourselves, not only affirm ourselves, as an identity but as a creative force.*”

The sense here is that “an identity” (particularly one statically understood) is not enough, it is not the vital aspect of the matter. Thus, “We have to create culture. We have to

realize cultural creations." It is here seen that only creation, invention, is the proof of the life, the being alive, of a culture, and its relationships, beliefs and practices, itself. This is revealed further into the interview when Foucault is asked about the innovation of gay sex practices that have multiplied to invent a gay culture. Foucault replies (focusing again particularly on S&M):

"*I don't think that this movement of sexual practices has anything to do with the disclosure or the uncovering of S&M tendencies deep within our unconscious, and so on. I think that S&M is much more than that; it's the real creation of new possibilities of pleasure, which people had no idea about previously. The idea that S&M is related to a deep violence, that S&M practice is a way of liberating this violence, this aggression, is stupid. We know very well what all those people are doing is not aggressive; they are inventing new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of their body — through the eroticization of the body. I think it's a kind of creation, a creative enterprise, which has as one of its main features what I call the desexualization of pleasure. The idea that bodily pleasure should always come from sexual pleasure as the root of all our possible pleasure — I think that's something quite wrong. These practices are insisting that we can produce pleasure with very odd things, very strange parts of our bodies, in very unusual situations, and so on.*

[So the conflation of pleasure and sex is being broken down.]

That's it precisely. The possibility of using our bodies as a possible source of very numerous pleasures is something that is very important. For instance, if you look at the traditional construction of pleasure, you see that bodily pleasure, or pleasures of the flesh, are always drinking, eating, and fucking. And that seems to be the limit of the understanding of our body, our pleasures. What frustrates me, for instance, is the fact that the problem of drugs

is always envisaged only as a problem of freedom and prohibition. I think that drugs must become a part of our culture...

[The point is to experiment with pleasure and its possibilities?]

Yes. Pleasure also must be a part of our culture. It is very interesting to note, for instance, that for centuries people generally, as well as doctors, psychiatrists, and even liberation movements, have always spoken about desire, and never about pleasure. 'We have to liberate our desire,' they say. No! We have to create new pleasure. And then maybe desire will follow."

This all sounds very self-educating, self-organizing and self-actualising; not to be led by desire but to invent new forms of pleasure which lead and hone our desire, that change and (note what's already been said by Foucault) transform us. But what about "identity" in all of this? Where, if at all, does it fit in? Foucault responds:

"*Well, if identity is only a game, if it is only a procedure to have relations, social and sexual pleasure relationships that create new friendships, it is useful. But if identity becomes the problem of sexual existence, and if people think that they have to 'uncover' their 'own identity,' and that their own identity has to become the law, the principle, the code of their existence; if the perennial question they ask is 'Does this thing conform to my identity?' then, I think, they will turn back to a kind of ethics very close to the old heterosexual virility. If we are asked to relate to the question of identity, it must be an identity to our unique selves. But the relationships we have to have with ourselves are not ones of identity, rather, they must be relationships of differentiation, of creation, of innovation. To be the same is*

really boring. We must not exclude identity if people find their pleasure through this identity, but we must not think of this identity as an ethical universal rule."

Identity here is basically a tool, a possibility for exploration, a hermeneutic device to explore pleasure creation. It is not an essentialist description of anyone. It is not something "I am". Rather, it is a form of understanding whose only purpose is to make use of it for something innovative thought worthwhile. As something static and imagined to be innate, a rule, it is empty, sterile and useless. Identity for Foucault should be an activity, something that people can join in with and cooperate on, not a label.

The interviewer now moves along to the question of power relations. He puts the following question to Foucault:

"*You write that power is not just a negative force but a productive one; that power is always there; that where there is power, there is resistance; and that resistance is never in a position of externality vis-a-vis power. If this is so, then how do we come to any other conclusion than that we are always trapped inside that relationship — that we can't somehow break out of it?*"

To which Foucault responds:

"*Well, I don't think the word trapped is a correct one. It is a struggle, but what I mean by power relations is the fact that we are in a strategic situation toward each other. For instance, being homosexuals, we are in a struggle with the government, and the government is in a struggle with us. When we deal with the government, the struggle, of course, is not symmetrical, the power situation is not the same; but we are in this struggle,*

and the continuation of this situation can influence the behavior or non-behaviour of the other. So we are not trapped. We are always in this kind of situation. It means that we always have possibilities, there are always possibilities of changing the situation. We cannot jump outside the situation, and there is no point where you are free from all power relations. But you can always change it. So what I've said does not mean that we are always trapped, but that we are always free — well, anyway, that there is always the possibility of changing.

[So resistance comes from within that dynamic?]

Yes. You see, if there was no resistance, there would be no power relations. Because it would simply be a matter of obedience. You have to use power relations to refer to the situation where you're not doing what you want. So resistance comes first, and resistance remains superior to the forces of the process; power relations are obliged to change with the resistance. So I think that resistance is the main word, the key word, in this dynamic."

Further pursuing the topic of power, the interviewer later moves on from here to discuss S&M once again, something he understands as "the eroticization of power". Foucault, however, doesn't simply accept this and wants to distinguish it from social power:

"*One can say that S&M is the eroticization of power, the eroticization of strategic relations. What strikes me with regard to S&M is how it differs from social power. What characterizes power is the fact that it is a strategic relation which has been stabilized through institutions. So the mobility in power relations is limited, and there are strongholds that are very, very difficult to suppress because they have been institutionalized and are now very*

pervasive in courts, codes, and so on. All this means that the strategic relations of people are made rigid."

This seems to play, once more, on Foucault's assertion that what is necessary socially is the social ability to alter or otherwise invent relations, something an institutionally organised social sphere retards our ability to do. Here, Foucault regards S&M as preferable as a type of relation for at least here, he suggests, "the S&M game is very interesting because it is a strategic relation, but it is always fluid. Of course, there are roles, but everybody knows very well that those roles can be reversed." Thus, he concludes: "I wouldn't say that (S&M) is a reproduction, inside the erotic relationship, of the structures of power. It is an acting-out of power structures by a strategic game that is able to give sexual pleasure or bodily pleasure." Foucault then goes on to call S&M "a sub-culture" that includes an identity in its creation (note here that it is an activity, a practice) and that is "a process of invention". He further describes it, tellingly, as "the use of a strategic relationship as a source of pleasure." As such, Foucault states this is not unique in a sexual context. In some cases, such things come before sex whereas, in S&M, they are incorporated (literally: made bodily) within it.

Foucault is now asked about his interview in *Le Gai Pied* which I discussed above where Foucault had said that it was engaging in relations of love outside of the established norms which bothers people. This interviewer here now asks him if he thinks such relations are seen as posing a threat to established social institutions. Foucault responds:

"*One thing that interests me now is the problem of friendship. For centuries after antiquity, friendship was a very important kind of social relation: a social relation within which people had a certain freedom, certain kind of choice (limited of course), as well as very intense*

emotional relations. There were also economic and social implications to these relationships — they were obliged to help their friends, and so on. I think that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we see these kinds of friendships disappearing, at least in the male society. And friendship begins to become something other than that. You can find, from the sixteenth century on, texts that explicitly criticize friendship as something dangerous. The army, bureaucracy, administration, universities, schools, and so on — in the modern senses of these words — cannot function with such intense friendships. I think there can be seen a very strong attempt in all these institutions to diminish or minimize the affectional relations...

... one of my hypotheses, which I am sure would be borne out if we did this, is that homosexuality became a problem — that is, sex between men became a problem — in the eighteenth century. We see the rise of it as a problem with the police, within the justice system, and so on. I think the reason it appears as a problem, as a social issue, at this time is that friendship had disappeared. As long as friendship was something important, was socially accepted, nobody realized men had sex together. You couldn't say that men didn't have sex together — it just didn't matter. It had no social implication, it was culturally accepted. Whether they fucked together or kissed had no importance. Absolutely no importance. Once friendship disappeared as a culturally accepted relation, the issue arose: 'What is going on between men?' And that's when the problem appears. And if men fuck together, or have sex together, that now appears as a problem. Well, I'm sure I'm right, that the disappearance of friendship as a social relation and the declaration of homosexuality as a social/political/medical problem are the same process."

This is certainly an interesting thesis and highlights, once again, that how things are seen or conceptualised has great bearing on our relations and what is then viewed as

acceptable or unacceptable (whilst posing the inadvertent question in the background of if any relations are particularly more “necessary” than any other rather than simply socially contingent). The interviewer here takes this and turns it into a question about setting up “new social relations, new value structures, familial structures, and so on”. He further points out that gay people don’t have easy access to the standing structures and institutions of family and monogamy. He therefore asks Foucault about possible gay institutions. Foucault responds that “We have come to realize that things never happen as we expect from a political program, and that a political program has always, or nearly always, led to abuse or political domination from a bloc — be it from technicians or bureaucrats or other people.” He thus concludes that “in my opinion, being without a program can be very useful and very original and creative, if it does not mean without proper reflection about what is going on, or without very careful attention to what’s possible.” He then closes this interview by adding:

“*Since the nineteenth century, great political institutions and great political parties have confiscated the process of political creation; that is, they have tried to give to political creation the form of a political program in order to take over power. I think what happened in the sixties and early seventies is something to be preserved. One of the things that I think should be preserved, however, is the fact that there has been political innovation, political creation, and political experimentation outside the great political parties, and outside the normal or ordinary program. It’s a fact that people’s everyday lives have changed from the early sixties to now, and certainly within my own life. And surely that is not due to political parties but is the result of many movements.*”

What are we to make of all this and how can we sum it up? What insights is Foucault bringing to bear on the subject OF “WILD RELATIONS” and what does it add to what I have already said before in the chapter above? Here are some thoughts:

1. My first point is quite a complex one focused more on the early points made by Foucault at the beginning of this chapter. These concern how relations are created, seen and understood contextually, and so the place of “knowledge” and interpretation in these matters. No relation, as should be obvious, ever speaks for itself. Those relating, or observing the relation, are socially, morally and politically positioned people who consequently have only an understanding or interpretation of what is going on. It follows that how we intellectually and morally configure our relations affects those relations themselves (i.e. in their conception and their subsequent practice). Notable here is that, however we conceive things, the social world beyond us is always moving relative to us. Certain relations can therefore go “in and out of fashion” even if we do nothing. It also follows, as Foucault’s own scholarship was apt to show, that new knowledges create new relationships. The innocent and unnoticed masturbator can become the morally deficient or the person with a medical problem in the blink of an eye if certain “knowledge” (which is actually “discourse”) comes to prominence. In this respect, Foucault’s remark that “the creation of sexuality as personal behaviour as a problem” became a problem is an example of sexuality being formulated in a certain way which sets a context in which sexuality, and so sexual phenomena and their relationships, comes to be understood. All this is to say that how we understand relationships is not fixed, is contingent (morally, socially, politically and intellectually) and is a matter of interpretation, discourse and rhetoric. Everything is a moving, broiling complex of relations and inter-relations materially, semiotically and ideologically.

2. In the context of my first point, my second suggests that this has consequences for us in terms of how we approach relationships where we want to communicate with people. Foucault earlier contrasted the polemicist with the person concerned with dialogue, that which he termed “the serious play of questions and answers”. Foucault imagined, rightly, that each scenario, in its being entered into, commits the participants to certain roles. It is a question for Foucault of asking after these commitments and where each mode of communication leads to. Can our interactions with people create new ideas or understandings? Can they open up a path to a new, cooperative, as yet undiscovered future? Or are they about securing a dogma already established and put beyond debate? In relational terms, we may ask if our interactions seek cooperative new futures as yet uninvented or to maintain constructions of the past. The point is that HOW we interact will have some bearing on this for not all modes of interaction come with the same possibilities, intentions or effects.

3. Foucault makes some interesting linkages between inquiry, knowledge, ethics and pleasure in the course of giving his various interviews. Most notable is that he seeks to gain insight into processes of knowledge creation and their social deployment in order to use this in the pursuance of his own survival. This is to ask after how we survive in social situations to which the Foucauldian answer is that we seek to gain genuine insight into what is going on and how it operates and comes to pass in order to fund our survival thereafter. Foucault himself does this as a person of ethical concern which, in his case, doesn’t simply mean the behaviour of others but, more importantly, of himself. Ethics is, in some sense, or at least potentially, always about being able to explain oneself, to give a rationale or justification for beliefs and actions (even if only to oneself), and Foucault seems to believe that this is not only a social but also a personal obligation. The innovation here is that Foucault thinks pleasure can function as that justification and be a

rationale and so he seeks to provide interpretations of the history of thought about sex which can substantiate that idea. This thus presents the reader with the question: why should pleasure not justify our relationships and our lives and provide the meaning that enables them?

4. Consequently, Foucault wants to explore the possibility of sexual understandings of friendship, the invention of new kinds of relations. Indeed, he sees it as the possibility of a multiplicity of kinds of relationship based on his historical belief that friendship itself has been a variable phenomenon that those with power in various situations and institutions have viewed in varying ways over time. Not all kinds of relation or friendship are always welcome in varying contexts but this only emphasises that varying kinds, and kinds as yet unimagined, are always possible to us.

5. An interesting point Foucault makes about sexuality is that it is not a “form of desire” but something that, instead, can itself be desirable. This seems to be to say that types of relationship, types of practices that create types of relationship, can be desired yet without themselves being a matter of something innate about us. Foucault always (quite rightly in my view) shies away from trying to anchor human beings to their “one true secret desire” or “the innate truth of our sexuality”. I think this is both wise (because “everything is a fiction”, a matter of the stories as conjurings we tell ourselves) and makes us more open to the possibilities of free relationships for it does not tie us to a static description of ourselves or our possibilities but enables us to explore, experiment and play. Consequently, we should not arbitrarily restrict ourselves but embrace the openness of possibility and play. (Yes, this means we should tell another, more open story.)

6. Foucault, in and between the various answers to his questioners, raises the prospect of “transgressive love”. This need not necessarily be “illegal love” for one can transgress moral codes without transgressing legal ones. (My example, as it has been before, would be German sex laws around the age of consent where a 14 year old can have sex with anyone legally above that age regardless of people’s moral scruples about it who are not the participants in the sexual liaison. It is assumed to be their business alone. We can also think of the example of homosexual sex — where it is legal — which, of course, is still not everywhere.) What I note, thinking about such a thing, is that where such love is “transgressive” people in a society often tend to focus almost entirely on the “transgressive” part of that construction as opposed to the “love” part. I have noticed this in my own thinking about the issue in relation to age gap sexual relations, more especially where the younger participant is of middle teen age and the automatic dogmatic or puritanical response (which is usually totally unexplained or justified without any rationale — it is just assumed as self-evident) is one of complete condemnation. Such people, it seems, have never considered that such a thing could be love (despite people sometimes speaking for themselves to the effect that it is experienced as such), so consumed are they by its (in their imaginations, at least) transgressive reality. What this leads us to have to grapple with, though, is the possibility that forms of love may either exist, or come to exist, which are transgressive by current moral or legal standards but that are, nevertheless, actually forms of love. We need to ask if love can then be put in a box, either by individuals or societies, or if outsiders can be arbiters of what shall count, or be experienced, as love by others. We must also ask ourselves why “transgression” in such cases is viewed as so much more important than “love”. (All this then also seems to validate Foucault’s own assertion that what bothers people is new or different forms of love. a question of the control of the wild.)

7. All this seems very important when we read Foucault talking about new forms of relationship and sexualities being “ways of life”. The fact that something is new, has been invented, is, in some sense, original, is, as Nietzsche knew very well in a book like *Daybreak* which is about “the prejudices of morality”, bound to be experienced as transgression at large. That which is original, Nietzsche says in *Daybreak*, has always been that received as a bad odour. Yet Foucault insists that types and kinds of loving will create certain relationships and so that newly invented ones will create new lifestyles and ways of relating to each other. Indeed, he encourages this in his wish for a sexual culture that is populated by “polymorphic, varied, and individually-modulated relationships”. Foucault does not here want a defined set of prescribed relationships; he wants the invention of as many kinds and types of relationships as a sexual culture is capable of — and the more the better and the richer that sexual culture will then be. A corollary of this sort of thinking is that we should then use sexuality in ways that can create new cultures out of new sexual relationships and this is precisely what “wild relations” is imagined to instantiate in a context of anarchy.

8. A vital part of this, not least because Foucault imagines its necessity even in his own contemporary situation, is “the liberty to transform the system”. He discusses this in one of his interviews as a “relational right”, a right to form legally recognised relations between people simply based on their desire to do so. This, however, is only the idea presented in the context of a liberal, legal framework; the wider wish is that people would have the ability to change and create their own relations and so essentially amounts to the creation of a societal framework in which such spontaneous morphing of relationships to suit individual contexts and circumstances can be accommodated. In their own political context, in a book about the history of human societal relations across millennia, this is exactly the same freedom that David Graeber and David Wengrow

prescribed for any healthy society that valued freedom and liberty over oppressive and coercive relations in *The Dawn of Everything*.

9. An interesting case study here is the S&M practices Foucault discusses and even uses as an example in his interviews. S&M, we may note, is actually a way to engage power in relationships of pleasure yet whilst that power itself remains ultimately benign. S&M is the ability to play or pretend with power in the context of a sexual game which is certainly relationship forming and enhancing — yet without the commonly detrimental effects evident of social power. S&M is then, in effect, a kind of relational exploration or experimentation which involves a lot of inventiveness which shows that engaging with power need not mean the roles taken up becoming stuck, therefore creating a problem of power imbalance and a permanent state of domination. It is also about creating new forms of love [see point 6] and affirming the participants as creative forces in their own right, those who can innovate relationships through sex and their sexual relationships. As such, it becomes a proof of the life of these relationships and an impetus to a particular sexual culture which is itself a way of life. S&M is then a demonstration that innovative sexual ways of life can be created which act to provide pleasure through new and exploratory kinds of relationship.

10. A further point here, which Foucault makes more than once, is that, in a liberal, rights-based context, rights themselves are never enough. What is necessary is to push past rights to create lifestyles, relationships and cultures. This is where the life of such things is found and not in some institution or body granting you a right (which, of course, it can later take away again). When considering this point against the background of any sort of egoistic, insurrectionary or directly acting anarchy, this imperative should seem manifestly obvious.

11. In one of his interviews Foucault talked about what he called the “desexualisation of pleasure” by which he seems to have meant physical, bodily pleasures, and intimacies, which are not directly sexual (i.e. involving stimulation of sexual organs). This could also be described as the creation of bodily intimacies beyond the sexual or of physical love relations, new cultures and practices of bodily pleasure, between those inventing new kinds of relationship — perhaps, for example, those which pay no heed to designations of gender or sexuality but that regard all human beings as those with physical bodies that can experience pleasure alike. This sounds very much like that which I imagine as practices of wild relations which adhere to no prejudicial prescription.

12. Foucault is not enamoured with the idea of identity as a meaningless label, a static entity or a secret desire. Instead, he sees identity as something we innovate, personally yet cooperatively, in and between ourselves. Thus, the possibility exists for a multitude of identities rather than a fixed or prescribed range. What matters for him is that this identity emerges from our practices of creating relationships and so creating culture, that it is a tool to be used by us rather than any hidden essence of our inner selves.

13. Finally, Foucault gives a description of power as a strategic relation constituted in and by our resistance to it (otherwise, as Foucault says, it would just be a relationship of obedience). What matters here, in political terms, is our ability to articulate that resistance in relationships and practices and, ultimately, our ability to imagine benign yet useful uses of power (like S&M) which is really power that does not get stuck due to its organisational form or institutional oversight. The problem with power is not that it exists *per se* (anthropological studies have shown how various societies have used power for community good from time to time in various ways) but that power gets stuck, creating an unchanging dominance that those affected by it have no ability to change (see points

8+9). Therefore, we must not be afraid to imagine and incorporate cultures of benign power which is power that cannot get stuck in a fixed, dominating and ultimately exploitative and coercive relation.

All that said, we can see these Foucauldian points, and my commentary upon them, as contributing to an attempt to instantiate wild, self-organisatory relations in and between human communities. We will discuss and develop on this further below beginning with the next chapter which asks after various historical ways anarchists have thought to organise human relations.

10. Gustav Landauer on Anarchist Relationships

"*The state is a social relationship; a certain way of people relating to one another. It can be destroyed by creating new social relationships; i.e., by people relating to one another differently.*" — Gustav Landauer, "Weak Statesmen, Weaker People!"

Gustav Landauer was a German Jewish anarchist born in 1870. He was a well educated person and became one of the leading German theorists of anarchism towards the end of the nineteenth century, having become an anarchist in university. Landauer, however, came to have a particular outlook on anarchism which he preferred to refer to (confusingly for his readers today) as "socialism" instead. This appears to be because Landauer was a pacifist and anarchism was associated, very strongly in the public mind helped along by capitalist propaganda, with violence which he decried and wrote against (he was also against World War 1 due to his pacifist views as well). Landauer therefore often referred to "socialism" instead (and initiated "socialist" propaganda organs and organisations) whilst his ideas were actually firmly anarchist — as we shall see.

Landauer's anarchism had numerous sources and betrayed attachments to Nietzsche and Stirner's intellectual ideas but also social or communist anarchist ideas of communal togetherness such as those of Kropotkin. He put forward several novel theories, which I shall come to below, and created a distinctive anarchist ethos based on the idea, as the quotation at the head of this chapter indicates, that "society" or "the state" is really nothing other than the relationships that create and maintain it. As a propagandist for his ideas, Landauer was prosecuted several times and imprisoned on occasion. He wrote pieces both meant to educate and cajole his readers but also more serious works of history, criticism and theoretical construction. Landauer was a social conservative who

believed in the family and had a distaste for a free or over-emphasised sexuality, believing it instigated “pornocracy”. He was ultimately murdered for his socially libertarian beliefs in May 1919 by soldiers of the right wing *Freikorps* who had been ordered to Bavaria to put down socialists and others, including Landauer, who were attempting to form a socialist government of some kind after the abdication of the king of Bavaria at the end of World War 1. Rudolf Rocker subsequently described Landauer as “one of Germany’s greatest spirits and finest men” and as “without doubt the greatest mind among all of Germany’s libertarian socialists.”

So let us look at Landauer’s ideas in a bit more detail to attempt to gain some understanding of his anarchism of relationships. (In quotations I shall keep his many references to “socialism” intact so long as it is understood that when he talks about “socialism” he means a socially understood conception of anarchism.) The now standard collection of Landauer’s works in English is *Revolution and Other Writings: A Political Reader* edited, compiled and translated by Gabriel Kuhn which gives a chronological and annotated presentation of Landauer’s ideas with a significant introduction. I shall concentrate here on several pieces from this book aiming to present key ideas from Landauer’s anarchist theoretical philosophy that add substance to my own ideas of anarchist relationships as I have been presenting them. In doing so, however, this is not to suggest that Landauer would have supported my ideas (my emphasis on sexuality, for example, would have been a cause for strong disagreement) but to argue that an anarchism of relationships that has something to say to us today was what Landauer was all about.

The first Landauer-authored piece I want to look at is from 1895 and is called “Anarchism-Socialism” and was originally published in the German *Journal for Anarchism and*

Socialism. Here we establish Landauer's anarchist starting point from the early period of his anarchist writing career. It is clear from the beginning that Landauer's vision is a hybridized one which brings diverse strands of thought together in a single, compound idea:

"*Anarchism is the goal that we pursue: the absence of domination and of the state; the freedom of the individual. Socialism is the means by which we want to reach and secure this freedom: solidarity, sharing, and cooperative labour.*"

Subsequently, he adds, at a time when the German political party, the SPD, was on the rise as the orthodox voice of German political democratic socialism, that:

"*Anyone who is not blinded by the dogmas of the political parties will recognize that anarchism and socialism are not opposed but co-dependent. True cooperative labour and true community can only exist where individuals are free, and free individuals can only exist where our needs are met by brotherly solidarity.*"

Landauer here wants to argue that "anarchism" and "socialism" are not opposed but complementary in a situation where the latter is taken to be forced collectivization whilst the former is imagined as an individualism which "spells atomization and egoism". Thus, the everyday person is imagined to believe that these are incompatible opposites. Landauer does not think so. Describing himself in passing as an "anarchist socialist", Landauer, giving an analogy about protecting a territory from rain, describes his view of this in the following way:

"*When it is useful, we can share a common roof — as long as it can be removed when it is not useful. At the same time, all individuals can have their own umbrellas, as long as they know how to handle them. And with regard to those who want to get wet — well, we will not force them to stay dry... what we need is the following: associations of humankind in affairs that concern the interests of humankind; associations of a particular people in affairs that concern the interests of a particular people; associations of particular social groups in affairs that concern particular social groups; associations of two people in affairs that concern the interests of two people; individualization in affairs that concern the interests of the individual.*"

He then goes on to add that "we anarchists want a free order of multiple, intertwined, colourful associations and companies... there is no need for a global parliament or any other global institution." Essentially, then, Landauer at this stage believes that things should be dealt with by those whom they concern, global issues by the global community, local issues by the local, and so on, and that fixed institutions play no part here in an anarchist conception of things. In essence, his belief is that "This order will be based upon the principle that all individuals are closest to their own interests" and that people should stick to these interests as those best positioned to deal with them without interference from arbitrary others. In this piece Landauer also speaks to a "well educated" populace where peoples' talents are "well nourished" as the basis for a healthy society. He says that "The principle of mutual aid will be central" and that "It will be impossible for individuals to accumulate riches leading to exploitation, as everyone in an anarchist society will understand that common usage of the land and the means of production is in their individual interest." He wants a society where "no group would gain anything by becoming exclusive" as they would forfeit the good will of their fellows and neighbours by doing so. He does not want a social system based on the necessity to work as he

believes this will create a new moral system of those worthy of their existence and those thought unworthy (those who can't or don't work). Thus, he places "the constraint of self-interest" above "the constraint of morality". Fundamentally, Landauer is convinced that "Anarchy is no lifeless system of ready-made thoughts. Anarchy is life; the life that awaits us after we have freed ourselves from the yoke."

In 1897 Landauer was asked to author a piece about anarchism for a liberal Berlin newspaper that was running a series of articles titled "The Parties in Their Own Words". Titled "A Few Words on Anarchism", Landauer began by refuting his task as anarchism is not, and cannot, be conceived of as a "party". (As I have noted before, Renzo Novatore would later be one who lambasted social forms of anarchism exactly because, in his mind, they had become parties.) But then he used this opportunity to speak to a general audience as an occasion to refute violence and anarchism's popular association with assassins and bomb throwers. He writes:

"*It is impossible to deny that anarchists have been involved in a number of the last decades' assassinations. However, in principle, anarchism and violence have nothing in common. The anarchist idea is a peaceful idea, opposed to aggressiveness and violence. This does not mean that we are all sheep. But it means that we want to live fully and brightly and as whole and mature personalities...*

However, back to the assassins: they are not motivated by the ideals of anarchism and they do not pursue anarchist intentions; in fact, intentions have nothing to do with their actions. Neither are they wild Stürmer; they are cold, closed haters. The waves caused by their desires break on the dams of a depressing shore: the present. Neither their longing for happiness and freedom nor their most elemental needs can be satisfied. All their emotions

are concentrated and compressed. They envision the blessed life of anarchy and the realization of their true inner being, while they cannot even feed themselves and their children. Gradually, many elements of their personality die: reflection, consideration, empathy, even their sense of self-preservation. Their life begins to be consumed by one sentiment only: the lust for revenge. Finally, the moment comes when all that has been hidden rushes to the surface, when all that has been frozen begins to boil and sizzle, when all that has been hardened melts, and when all that has been suppressed explodes. Then, the world reacts with outrage and implements emergency laws to protect itself against the blessed life of anarchy and its secret adherents. This is the same world that never considers measures against itself, that never considers oppressing oppression. But, of course, it would not do this. If it did, it would not be the world: tout le monde – not only on Mondays, but on all weekdays...

It is easy to condemn the assassins. However, I try to understand them psychologically, and if I were a lawyer, I would defend them against the limitations of bourgeois 'justice.' My closing words would be: abdicate the authoritarian violence and the protection of privilege and robbery, and there will be no more outlaws and no more rebellious violence!"

Landauer thus takes a public stance against violence, and the violent, but he also realises these are people reacting to a cause and not just random monsters. Landauer had in fact read several defence speeches by anarchist assassins (including Ravachol, Auguste Vaillant and Émile Henry that I have discussed myself before) and so was familiar with their deeds and stated motivations. But he was not himself a "propaganda of the deed" person. Here his reflections on violence lead to the following conclusions:

"*From what I have said so far, two things follow: first, that anarchism cannot be a mass movement in our times, but only one of individuals, of pioneers... Secondly, that we are unwavering optimists despite our principal skepticism. We are not old school individualists. We believe in the good of humanity and in humanity's capabilities. We want an anarchist society; not a society of individual heroes and autocrats, but a society where individuals can live together on the basis of free association and respect; in other (economic) words: socialism.*"

Landauer, thus, lays down two early markers in regard to his understanding of anarchism: this is not a mass movement or populist collectivity but rather a movement of individual pioneers enabled by their free associations and common respect. In other words, it is an ethical movement of certain kinds of people, a wild formation of its own.

Landauer is drawn to write on violence again, but in a rather different way than Emma Goldman did on the same occasion, by the murder of US President McKinley by Leon Czolgosz. Here he rhetorically sets himself apart from "the anarchists" (seemingly accepting the association of anarchists with violence — even if only for rhetorical effect) and is now beginning to distinguish his own thoughts about anarchism from those of others on the way to being able to describe a specific construction of anarchism which amounts to his own understanding of it. In the case of this essay, "Anarchic Thoughts on Anarchism", Landauer begins by finding the idea of "anarchism through violence" rather bizarre. He writes:

"*It seems to me that Mowbray's statement is a fitting expression of what has almost become an anarchist dogma, namely to perceive the assassination of people in power as an anarchist act. And, indeed, almost all the people involved in such assassinations in the last*

decades were motivated by anarchist beliefs. Any unbiased observer would doubtlessly call this odd. For what has the killing of people to do with anarchism, a theory striving for a society without government and authoritarian coercion, a movement against the state and legalized violence? The answer is: nothing at all. However, some anarchists seem to have come to the conclusion that merely educating and talking has not got them very far. The social reconstruction is not to be had because the rulers' force stands in the way. Thus, so they conclude, destruction must be put alongside construction and mere propaganda by the word. They are too weak to tear down all borders, so they turn to propagating the deed – and to make propaganda by the deed. The political parties pursue positive political action – so the anarchists think that they, as individuals, have to engage in a positive anti-politics, a negative politics. These rationales explain their 'political action': propaganda by the deed and individual terrorism."

Landauer charges all such people with self-aggrandizing motives and acting like the states they want to get rid of. He thinks of "anarchism by violence" as the anarchism of those who have not anarchised their thought but just become an anarchist mirror image of what they hate and despise. So, he says plainly: "These anarchists are not anarchic enough for me" and accuses them of acting "like a political party" and of being "simple-minded". "What does violence actually achieve?" is his thought process. He calls many anarchists simple dogmatists in their beliefs and attachments to violent courses of action. Reading beneath the lines, however, one sees that Landauer is critiquing the psychology of violence and asking after its ultimate ends. As a man who will be revealed to be very attached to the idea that the means must be indistinguishable from the ends, violence can never be the answer for him. Violence just leads to endless hatred, war, and death, a never-ending cycle of violence. Is that what an anarchist wants? Thus:

"*This is the basic fallacy of the revolutionary anarchists (a fallacy which I long enough shared with them): the notion that one can reach the ideal of non-violence by violent means. At the same time, they object strongly to the 'revolutionary dictatorship' that Marx and Engels called for in their Communist Manifesto as a short transitional stage after the revolution. But these are self-deceptions. Any kind of violence is dictatorial, unless it is borne voluntarily, accepted by the subjugated masses. But this is not the case in the anarchist assassinations, which are a matter of authoritarian violence. All violence is either despotism or authority.*"

It is important to highlight Landauer's stand against violence here because it actually opens the door to the question "If not violence, then what?" But Landauer has an answer to that question and he begins to bring it out in this piece:

"*What the anarchists must realize is that a goal can only be reached if it is already reflected in its means. Non-violence cannot be attained by violence. Anarchy exists wherever one finds true anarchists: people who do not engage in violence. What I am saying is nothing new. It is what Tolstoy has been telling us for a long time...*

The revolutionary anarchists will object: if we are non-violent, we allow ourselves to be exploited and suppressed and will hence not be free but slaves. When we speak of non-violence, they claim, this does not concern the behavior of individuals but social organization. We want anarchy, the argument continues, but first we must take back that of which we have been robbed and which we are being denied.

However, this is yet another crucial fallacy: that one can – or must – bring anarchism to the world; that anarchy is an affair of all of humanity; that there will indeed be a day of

judgment followed by a millennial era. Those who want 'to bring freedom to the world' – which will always be their idea of freedom – are tyrants, not anarchists. Anarchy will never be a matter of the masses, it will never be established by means of military attack or armed revolt, just as the ideal of federalist socialism will never be reached by waiting until the already accumulated capital and the title of the land will fall into the people's hands. Anarchy is not a matter of the future; it is a matter of the present. It is not a matter of making demands; it is a matter of how one lives. Anarchy is not about the nationalization of the achievements of the past but about a new people arising from humble beginnings in small communities that form in the midst of the old: an inward colonization. Anarchy is not about a struggle between classes – the dispossessed against the possessors – but about free, strong, and sovereign individuals breaking free from mass culture and uniting in new forms. The old opposition between destruction and construction begins to lose its meaning: what is at stake are new forms that have never been.

If the anarchists realized that the core of anarchy lies in the depths of human nature, and if they were able to follow this as a guiding principle, then this would lead them far from the masses, and they would recognize with a shudder what a distance yawns between their convictions and their current actions; then they would recognize that it is all too common and trite for an anarchist to kill a McKinley or to make similarly pointless tragic gestures. Whoever kills, dies. Those who want to create life must also embrace it and be reborn from within."

This seems to me to come via the cogitations of Stirner, of which Landauer was aware, and his distinction between "revolution" and "insurrection". The insurrectionist, as my readers may remember, "does not allow themselves to be organised" — to paraphrase Stirner. The revolutionist, on the other hand, just wants to impose their kind of order and

Landauer essentially accuses far too many anarchists of being the latter, rather than the former — IN ERROR. For Landauer, as we shall see, anarchism is essentially something about you, who your are, your ethical, intellectual and political self, that radiates out in and through relationships, in and through new social forms. It is not, is never, a dogmatic and enforced "anarchism" to be imposed on others, even if regarded as an imagined benevolent way "for the good of all". Anarchism, for Landauer, is definitely not something imagined by analogy to a Christian "end of days" or the war to end all wars. It is not about killing all the bad guys so that only good guys are left. How Landauer ends this piece is then instructive of what he sees as wrong in anarchist conceptions of things and of an anarchist mindset he imagines needs to be ended and updated:

"*The anarchists have always been far too fond of systems and attached to rigid, narrow concepts. This, in fact, is the final answer to the question as to how anarchists can find value in the killing of fellow human beings. They have become used to dealing with concepts instead of real people. They have separated humanity into two static and hostile classes. When they kill, they do not kill human beings but concepts – that of the exploiter, the oppressor, the representative of the state. This is why those who are often the kindest and most humane in their private lives commit the most inhumane acts in the public sphere. There, they do not feel; they have switched off their senses. They act as exclusively rational beings who – like Robespierre – are the servants of reason; a reason that divides and judges. This cold, spiritually empty, and destructive logic is the rationale for the death sentences handed down by the anarchists. But anarchy is neither as easily achievable, nor as morally harsh, nor as clearly defined as these anarchists would have it. Only when anarchy becomes, for us, a dark, deep dream, not a vision attainable through concepts, can our ethics and our actions become one.*"

Gabriel Kuhn suggests that this piece criticising and contradicting an anarchism with a logic of violence be paired with the next one I want to consider, the essay “Through Separation To Community”. In this essay Landauer is not responding to events or ideas but presenting his own case for a vision of anarchism and the chosen title is representative of the idea. Here Landauer is to more fully explain his distinction between people based on their consciousness or spirit (some have called Landauer’s a “mystical” anarchism based on such ideas as I am about to share of his here; I think of him as a purveyor of a “spiritual anarchism” if we understand this in Nietzschean, “free-spirited” senses and not Christian senses), an intelligent and active ethical spatial awareness of themselves and others in society. For example, Landauer begins this essay by diagnosing a gap between a “vanguard” and “the rest of humankind”. What distinguishes people is how they react to their being socially contextualised. He says:

“*It is not a matter of knowledge or ability, but of perspective and orientation. The social position of the mass individual derives from a heritage that determines his being from the outside as well as from within: he belongs to a certain family and a certain class, he acquires certain knowledge and follows a certain faith, he turns to a certain profession, he is Protestant or Catholic, a German or an English patriot, a shop keeper or a newspaper editor. Authority, custom, morality, time, and class define his existence.*”

But since it is few indeed who react to their circumstances by seeing through them and gaining new consciousness of themselves and others in the world (mass media, political and economic propaganda and now social media sees to that), what is required is a response to this and action in such a situation. What is the anarchist (a person of particular consciousness or spirit that is not the general consciousness or spirit) to do? Landauer is quite clear:

"*Our souls cannot tolerate this confusion any longer. The conclusion is that we must cease descending to the masses. Instead, we must precede them. At first, it might seem as if we were walking away from them. But we can only find the community that we need and long for if we – the new generation – separate ourselves from the old communities. If we make this separation a radical one and if we – as separated individuals – allow ourselves to sink to the depths of our being and to reach the inner core of our most hidden nature, then we will find the most ancient and complete community: a community encompassing not only all of humanity but the entire universe. Whoever discovers this community in himself will be eternally blessed and joyful, and a return to the common and arbitrary communities of today will be impossible.*"

Here Landauer distinguishes three types of community: an individual community (i.e. a community of individuals), bourgeois states and societies and an anarchist community which he glosses as "the free momentary associations of individuals based on common interests". Landauer says: "I try to build myself a new world, knowing that I do not really have any ground to build it on; all I have is a need." He sees the community to be built as "opening ourselves to what lies beyond our I by using our I. We use our senses to reach out towards what lies beyond them; we attempt to understand the world with the whole richness of our lives, with our passions, and with our deepest contemplation." He suggests that, "We must realize that we do not just perceive the world, but that we are the world." He asks that we "return completely to ourselves [that] we may truly find the universe" in a conception that imagines the whole world is in every living thing. He operates within a philosophical notion of the infinite that makes us all part of an "eternal stream":

"*Let us make it clear to ourselves – and we now know what it means to make something clear, namely to create a necessary disposition – that past, present and future – as well as the notions of 'here' and 'there' – are only a unique/unified eternal stream that flows from the infinite to the infinite. There is neither a cause for nor an effect of this world.*"

This appears to be in order to counteract a purely materialistic (and often simply economic) understanding of the world prevalent among Marxists, communists and anarchists at that time (I have mentioned the pitfalls of a simply political and economic anarchism myself before). Landauer imagines that we think with "psychological metaphoric language" anyway. In the end he finds that "Matter is rigid and stiff; no wonder that materialists are too." But this is not in the cause of religious speculations for Landauer accepts the arguments of Stirner and what he describes as his agenda of permanently dethroning all gods and anything thought "sacred". He writes:

"*The last great nominalist was Max Stirner, who, with the most radical thoroughness, freed our minds of the spook that abstract notions are. The essence of his teachings can be summarized in the following paraphrased words: 'The concept of God has to be destroyed. But it is not God who is the enemy – it is the concept.' Stirner discovered that all actual oppression comes, in the end, from concepts and ideas that are accepted as sacred. With a fearless, strong, and determined hand he took notions such as God, sacredness, morality, state, society, and love apart and demonstrated laughingly their hollowness.*"

Landauer thus locates the source of our oppression to our ideas and beliefs, that which we intellectually accept and morally justify. But Landauer doesn't stop there for he accuses Stirner of making a new kind of sacred of his own: "the concrete and isolated individual". Landauer wishes to abolish this too and suggests "there are no individuals,

only affinities and communities"; there is only "immanent life" and "present forces". A human being is never alone but only a being with more or less active connections to and with others who are no less alive and existing than they; everything exists at once and you are part of that everything:

"*What we are part of is an unbreakable chain that comes from the infinite and proceeds to the infinite, even if little segments might tear off and experience complications. Everything we make while we are alive connects us with the universe. And even our dead body is a bridge that is used to continue our journey through the universe.*"

The world is, thus, a "complex soul stream" and "Our world can only be understood if we understand the several parallel, supplementing perspectives by which we have created it", a kind of anarcho-spiritual intersectionality. You might now be wondering what all this spiritual, philosophical mumbo-jumbo has to do with anarchism but here comes the point: "effectiveness is reality... what is real are the connections and the communities." Thus:

"*The individual bodies which have lived on this earth from its beginnings are not just a sum of isolated individual beings; they form a big and real community, an organism; an organism that changes permanently, that always manifests itself in new individual shapes. As little as our consciousness usually knows about the powerful and real life of our allegedly unconscious desires, reflexes, and physical automatisms, as little do we know about the life of the ancestors in ourselves. And yet their existence is undeniable. If we do not acknowledge this, the meaning of life and the world will remain mysterious to us; they will be all matter, all perception, all spook...*

Humanity is no abstract, dead term to us; humanity is real and alive, and the individuals are – together with their consciousness – the individually emerging, changing, and disappearing (another form of changing) shadows that make humanity visible."

Landauer thus sees a connection with others in each one of us just by virtue of the fact that we exist. We are not unique beings; we do not live in, nor have we come from, a vacuum. We are a snapshot of an organism or a community in our own selves. That is a connection, a clue to our networked natures set within us. Landauer thus advocates for community for he imagines each of us to be one in miniature, our social connections constitutive of what makes us what we are. But here we are not talking about "arbitrary commonalities enforced by authority". These, says Landauer, are the "superficiality of herd mentality" (the latter phrase betraying Landauer's Nietzschean reading). What Landauer means is that "the true individuality that we find in the deepest depths of our selves is community" and so:

"*Once individuals have transformed themselves into communities, then they are ready to form wider communities with like-minded individuals. These will be new kinds of communities, established by individuals with the courage and the need to separate from the dullness of superficiality.*"

Yet there is another mystical, spiritual thing that this has to do with, a way we feel and materialise this community nature. Its called "love":

"*There is yet another way to feel the infinite, the most splendid of them all. We are all familiar with it as long as we are not entirely corrupted by the decadence and egotistical superficiality of our distorted and arbitrary communities. I speak of love. Love is such a*

wonderful and universal feeling, a feeling that spins us round and elevates us to the stars, because it is a cord that connects our childhood with the universe. There lies a deeper meaning in the fact that the name for the experience of community, the feeling that connects us with humanity: love, human love, is the same name that we use for the love between the sexes that connects us with the following generations. Damn the soulless who do not shiver when they hear of love! Damn those for whom sexual satisfaction is nothing but a physical sensation! Love sets the world alight and sends sparks through our being. It is the deepest and most powerful way to understand the most precious that we have."

"A love for humanity", suggests Landauer, "is part of our most genuine being." But hold on a moment. Didn't Landauer start off here by saying there was a vast gulf in consciousness between the anarchists and the rest? He is not unaware of this:

"*I have talked about the gap between us, the new human beings, and the masses, and about the necessity to separate ourselves from those united by the state. This might seem to contradict my belief that a love for humanity is part of our most genuine being. Let me explain: on the one hand, it seems clear that all contemporary human beings – the civilized as well as the others – are so closely related to us that it is difficult not to love them as we love anyone who is close to us. On the other hand, the relationship is as difficult as it often is with our closest relatives: they are very close to us in their being and their characteristics, and we do feel the bond of blood and we do love them – but we cannot live with them. Most of our contemporaries have deformed their humanity because of their statist and social lowliness and stupidity; they have also deformed their animalness with their hypocrisy, false morality, cowardice, and unnaturalness. Even during occasional hours of clarity or despair they cannot shed their masks. They have blocked their way to the universe; they have*

forgotten that they can turn themselves into Gods. We want to be everything though: humans, animals, and Gods! We want to be heroes!"

Thus, Landauer's proposal is that those of anarchist consciousness, those of free spirit, those who are "the new human beings", separate themselves from society and create their own, new communities. He justifies this not just out of necessity but "for the love of humanity". These new people must live new lives for everybody's sake and create "centres of a new kind of being" and he issues this as a call to all who will listen, who want to live new anarchist lives by different values and principles, by a new ethic and ideals:

"*for the love of humanity that has lost its way, for the love of those who will come after us, for the love, finally, of the best in ourselves, we want to leave these people, we want our own company and our own lives! Away from the state, as far as we can get! Away from goods and commerce! Away from the philistines! Let us – us few who feel like heirs to the millennia, who feel simple and eternal, who are Gods – form a small community in joy and activity. Let us create ourselves as exemplary human beings. Let us express all our desires: the desire for quietism as well as activism; the desire for reflection as well as celebration; the desire for labour as well as relaxation. There is no other way for us! This intimate belief is born from grief: we want to feel the highest joy of creation because we are desperate. Those who have already experienced it know that the only way to awaken people is by religious genius, i.e., by the exemplary life of those who do everything to rise from the abyss. These individuals know that all these questions are serious existential questions.*"

This is what Landauer means by "through separation to community".

The next piece I shall consider is Landauer's extended historical essay from 1907 "Revolution". This essay is about revolution in various historical eras in order to propose an understanding of revolution, its aims, purposes and uses, itself. It should not be surprising that the conclusion here cannot be a catastrophic material event which changes world circumstances for the better forever like a kind of anarchist apocalypse, materially understood. By now, we should know very well things cannot play out this way for Landauer. Thus, it gives nothing away to start at the end here where Landauer concludes that "no revolution will ever achieve its goals. Revolution is a means in itself: it serves the revitalization of force and spirit." Here Landauer does not mean to suggest that physical revolution is pointless; it is just that if this is all it is then it really misses his point. But what then is "revolution" for Landauer? -:

"*Revolution concerns communality in all its dimensions. This means not only the state, the estates of the realm, the religious institutions, economic life, intellectual life, schools, arts, or education, but the combination of all of those; a combination that, for a certain period of time, rests in a relative state of authoritative stability.*"

Here Landauer reveals his socially conservative side, however, for he will go on to say "people of spirit – spirit being love and creating communality – need the family, the herd, the nation (language, customs, arts). These social forms are the bridges of light that connect our different worlds. They also create new forms of community that overcome the rigid forms of community created by hatred, lack of spirit, and meanness." With this I do not agree for reasons that should be obvious from the previous text in this book and that which will be further expounded in what remains of it. Landauer, however, wants to build his revolution on just such foundations and whether they are good for "spirit" or not is the point. Thus, much later on in the essay, he says:

"*During revolution, people are filled by spirit and differ completely from those without spirit. During revolution, everyone is filled with the spirit that is otherwise reserved for exemplary individuals; everyone is courageous, wild and fanatic, and caring and loving at the same time. Once the spirit is gone, however, they all want panem et circenses, 'bread and circuses,' again.*"

Here I hope you can see why I talk about "consciousness" in reference to Landauer for this seems to be analogous to what "spirit" seems to refer to. In revolutionary times people become possessed of (or is it by?) a revolutionary consciousness, the revolutionary spirit is abroad. But in non-revolutionary times Landauer seems to conceive of said spirit or consciousness in a more restrictive, perhaps elitist, way — for it is only "exemplary" individuals who are possessed of (by?) it. Landauer's understanding of "revolution", in fact, is one compatible with the ideas of someone I have discussed before through the postanarchist work of Saul Newman, that person being Etienne de La Boétie with his *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*, a book he is said to have written aged only 16. (There are so many feisty teenagers it seems. Strange when some "anarchists" are keen to rob so many teenagers of any agency at all.) Landauer is eager to incorporate La Boétie's book into his own essay on revolution since La Boétie is one who thinks that it is up to us who are possessed of (by?) spirit to act directly in our own emancipation. Thus, his question is "how can an entire people, consisting of countless individuals, allow a single person to torture them, abuse them, and rule over them against their interests and against their will?" The answer that La Boétie gives is quoted by Landauer directly:

"*How can he [the tyrant] have so many eyes with which to control you if you do not lend him your own? How can he have so many hands to hit you if you do not provide them? How can he ever have power over you if not through you? How can he persecute you if you do not*

allow him to? What can he do to you if you are not the dealer of the thief who robs you, and the helper of the murderer who kills you? What can he do to you if you are not your own traitor?"

From this Landauer comes to his own explanation that, whatever freedoms we may once have had, they were somehow taken away and servitude was nurtured in their place. This is important for Landauer for he conceives that whatever is nurtured is that which ultimately wins out: "The natural may be as good as it is, but it disappears if it is not nurtured. Nurture will always determine us, whatever form it may take, and regardless of our nature" (quoting La Boétie). The fact is that many humans "do not know any better than to be subservient" for "they have always been that way". Thus, quoting La Boétie again: "They turn themselves into the property of those who oppress them, because time has made this appear inevitable. In reality, though, time never rights a wrong but multiplies it endless times." The point Landauer makes here in his interpretation of La Boétie is that "love and friendship only exist among good people. 'Where there is cruelty, dishonesty, injustice, there cannot be friendship'"; instead there is only looking after number one, looking out for yourself, always looking over your shoulder and worrying about when the next coercion or the next taking advantage of will come. Its all about relationships. But, from the individual point of view: "we need nothing... but the desire and the will to be free. We suffer a servitude that is voluntary." We need a revolutionary consciousness, a free spirit of insurrection, and therefore: "The fire of tyranny cannot be fought from the outside with water. It is the source that has to be eliminated. The people who feed it must stop doing so. What they sacrifice for it, they must keep for themselves."

He quotes La Boétie once again to hammer this point home further:

"*It is not necessary to fight the tyrant. Neither is it necessary to defend oneself against him. The tyrant will eventually defeat himself. People only need to stop accepting servitude. They do not need to take anything away from the tyrant, they must only stop giving to him. Nor need they change themselves, they need only stop hindering their own development. ... When the tyrant does not receive and is no longer obeyed, he ends up naked, without force and without power. He ends up being nothing. He shares the fate of a root that is left without water and nourishment : it turns into a dry, dead piece of wood.*"

This articulates a fundamental point for Landauer, something which is the basis of his thought and essential to his construction of an anarchism: that point is that anarchism comes from WITHIN YOU. He writes:

"*If individual revolutions are recurring microcosms that summarize and precede revolution's general ideals, then La Boétie's essay is the most perfect of all of revolution's microcosms. It represents a spirit that first appears to be solely negative, but soon draws enough power from this negativity to proclaim the positive that has to come even if it cannot be described yet. La Boétie's essay already said what others would later say in various languages: Godwin, Stirner, Proudhon, Bakunin, Tolstoy... The message is: It is in you! It is not on the outside. It is you. Humans shall not be united by domination, but as brothers without domination: an-archy… The negation of rebellious souls is filled with love; a love that is force, in the sense formulated so well by Bakunin: 'The joy of destruction is a creative joy.' Rebellious souls know that humans are brothers and that they ought to live as such. But they believe that it suffices to overcome external obstacles and external powers. This, however, will make men brothers only while they fight – and maybe overcome – these obstacles and powers. A common spirit can be felt during the revolution – but it does not come to life. Once the revolution is over, it is gone. We can hear people say: yes, but the*

spirit will remain once the revolution has truly been victorious, when the old can never rise again! According to the same logic one might say: if I could hold on to my dreams and mould them by memory and consciousness, then I would be the greatest poet. Both the reality and the idea of revolution define it as a period of health between periods of sickness. If there were no sickness before and after it, it would not be what it is.

A true change of humanity needs a supplement to revolution, something of an entirely different nature. We can add a variation to the motto above: without domination – with spirit! It will not suffice, however, to just call upon the spirit. The spirit has to come over us. It needs a cover and a form. It does not listen to the mere name 'spirit' either. Nobody knows its real name and what it really is. This creates an anxiety that helps us to be committed to transition and progress. Not knowing what to expect means to keep ideas alive. What would ideas mean to us if they were already real?"

So Landauer's formula here is "without domination — with spirit". But it is about more than us and so Landauer conceives not just of people of spirit but communities of people — outside the state — of spirit as well. These are "not as a sum of isolated individual atoms, but as an organic unity, a web of many groups". Landauer thinks of this not as something new but as "something that has existed for a long time". He conceives that "a common spirit can only arrive when there is something it can fill and form; something that it can live and spread out from" which in turn suggests that groups of spirited individuals need to give community form to their common existence and "common spirit". This brings us to the point of revolution, once again, in Landauer's eyes:

"*This is the destiny of revolution in our times: to provide a spiritual pool for humanity. It is in revolution's fire, in its enthusiasm, its brotherhood, its aggressiveness that the image and*

the feeling of positive unification awakens; a unification that comes through a connecting quality: love as force. Without temporary regeneration we cannot carry on and are condemned to drown."

Landauer sees in revolution then a love, joy and hope kindled in the hearts and minds of many as regenerative energies. He is under no illusions that revolutions work (although he concedes they may bring some incremental benefits that may or may not be lost again over time) but that does not matter for it is the generation of this spirit that is the point. In revolutionary times people act and have belief. They act for themselves and their loved ones and even simply others like them who join with them. Solidarity of cause is created with other human beings. It is this spirit, and all it can then generate and create, that we need. This is where the real revolution lies. Thus:

"*Some try to convince us in these flaccid and weak times, bereft of sentiment and ashamed of love and affection, that brotherhood has become nothing more than a word. Nothing could be further from the truth; we must declare it loudly and without hesitation: humans are brothers. This is what all past revolutions have taught us and what we will teach all future revolutions. There are words whose origins are strong enough to withstand all frivolous and narrow-minded adaptations, as well as all forms of ridicule. We owe the word brotherhood to the French Revolution. It summarizes its joy: humans felt like brothers – and, let us not forget, like sisters too!*"

These words are uttered in the course of saying that the problem with the state is that it replaces spirit and this brotherhood "with domination, external control, and death". Landauer thinks of spirit as "inner sovereignty" in a very Stirnerite/Nietzschean kind of way that is compatible with La Boétie's desired voluntary inservitude. His communities

are communities of such people which is why they are also conceived of as communities of spirit too. Thus, “in the end, social revolution means nothing but peaceful construction and organisation based on a new spirit and creating a new spirit” and Landauer foresees “a Bund of economic communities” (“Bund” is a German word which can mean federation, alliance, union or association) taking the place of the state. But it is not a matter, as in the biblical Acts of the Apostles, of waiting for the spirit to settle upon us. “It is not the spirit that sends us on our way, it is our way that allows the spirit to rise.” We who are conscious of this spirit within us must rise up and act and nurture that spirit within us.

We have now reached the time in Landauer’s life when he got involved in creating such a Bund which was called “The Socialist Bund”. Consequently, around this time period (1909–1910), he wrote several articles and pamphlets which were published to publicise it. The first of these I consider is “What Does The Socialist Bund Want?” and that question is fairly answered in the first line: “The Socialist Bund wants to unite all humans who are serious about realizing socialism” (i.e. anarchism). Contrary to other ideas that anarchism is only a distant dream after society has been appropriately prepared and educated, Landauer adds that “socialism will never come if you do not create it”. To those who say revolution must come first, Landauer replies “But how? And from where?” Landauer’s Bund, then, and his idea, is not to wait, not to fixate on metanarratives of absolute apocalypse and world change, but to get on locally with what those of spirit and like mind can do here and now. He is clear that “We say that everything must be turned upside down! We refuse to wait for the revolution in order to begin the realization of socialism; we begin the realization of socialism to bring about the revolution!” A concern here is that people, even revolutionaries, create lives WITHIN CAPITALISM when what is needed is to create lives OUTSIDE CAPITALISM. This seems a vital distinction for capitalism is itself little other than a set of coercive relationships and how can anarchism come if you stay within it? A

definitive break must be made. New relationships must begin. In this respect, Landauer sees the state as playing the role of capitalism's guardian, doing just enough, or what is necessary, to keep people within capitalism:

"*What does the state do? It alleviates some of the greatest suffering; it saves capitalism from killing itself using insurance, welfare, and legal interventions; it maintains the system of injustice, of senseless production, and of senseless distribution of goods. Capitalism proceeds. This is the result of the state's efforts; and this includes the efforts of the working class and its representatives.*"

The only interest of capitalists, whether CEOs or politicians, is THAT CAPITALISM PROCEEDS. Often this is with the acquiescent help of people who, nominally, are pledged to destroy it (as La Boétie described as voluntary servitude). But capitalism doesn't care whether you like it or not provided that, willingly or not, you go along with it. Yet capitalism is only a system of relationships that we all of us support by our participation in it. Yes, corporations and governments may harass and cajole us to carry on capitalisting but, as La Boétie suggested, we could just say no; we have the power of refusal. Of course, there are consequences to this (good ones from an egoist and anarchist perspective — like taking responsibility for ourselves) but there are also consequences from carrying on capitalisting, consequences like global environmental destruction and the increasing misery of life on earth. Capitalism only takes, exploits and chucks its waste away. It does little else and has no concern for life. Yet even workers and consumers play their part in this for, as I said, this is little other than a system of relationships in reality. Whatever "reforms" are ever offered in such a scenario by politicians are always only in order to keep capitalism going. The one thing all those most benefiting from it in the short term don't want is that it should cease as a way to organise human relations

completely. How do we stop capitalism though? By acting, and so relating, in other ways. One idea Landauer has here is “the active general strike” which is ceasing working for capitalist employers and beginning to work for yourself. Landauer introduces it here like this:

“*We demand the active general strike! This does not mean that we instantly turn to ‘fighting the state and capital.’ We do not begin at the end, but at the beginning! If nothing has been done for socialism so far, if there are no signs of it yet, then what are we going to fight and die for? For the domination of some leaders, who will tell us what to do, and what to produce, and how to distribute it? Would it not be better if we knew and did all this ourselves? Hence, we say: the action of the working people is ... work! In the active general strike, the workers will starve the capitalists, because they will work for themselves and their own needs! You capitalists will still have money, documents, and machines of course. Eat them! Exchange them! Sell them! Do whatever you want. If it does not help you, however ... then work! Work like us.*

You will no longer get our labour. We need it ourselves. And we have freed it from your restraints. We now use it for the creation of socialism. The day when this happens will mark the only true beginning of socialism.”

A second article Landauer produced in respect of The Socialist Bund, and in *The Socialist* publication he edited, was “The Socialist Way” where he sets out plainly that an anarchism of his understanding is one that leaves the capitalist ground it stands on for other ground. He puts this simply as “We desire different forms of human relations.” Consequently:

"*The first step in the struggle of the oppressed and suffering classes, as well as in the awakening of the rebellious individual's spirit, is always insurgency, outrage, a wild and raging sensation. If this is strong enough, realizations and actions are directly connected to it: both actions of destruction and actions of creation...*

In times like these, we must no longer reflect upon the reality that surrounds us and the ideas that fill our minds. We must find the people who are willing to leave this ugly, oppressive, and corrupting reality behind and proceed to a new one. We have to ask who the creators are. We have to ask not about people's theories and ideals, but about their strength to no longer partake."

This leads Landauer once more to refer to "through separation to community" as his ideal for Landauer again concedes that the genuine revolutionaries who are actually prepared to risk a life without and against capitalism, and instead pursue a life of love, brotherhood and freedom, are precious few indeed. Such people (of whom Landauer was not really one for he actually never carried out these ideas himself unlike, say, Émile Armand who did carry out his associated ideas of amorous camaraderie) are perceived as "role models and shining examples for the whole world" and as those who, by their own movement, provide the impetus that pulls others along. In this Landauer spies a crumb of egoism but it is not a crumb about which to be detrimental:

"*The individualists, the individualist anarchists, have always called upon the pride, the self-respect, and the sovereignty of the individual. Their usual advice for the oppressed has been: if you had as much egoism as your masters, you would not have any masters. As a simple calculation this is not entirely wrong: egoism keeps egoism at bay. The individualists have always taught that the proper egoist will respect the rights of others because he*

respects himself; furthermore, he will be smart enough not to attack others in order to avoid being attacked, etc. There has, from its beginnings with Mister (and Master) Stirner, always been a certain coldness of reason in these teachings."

It might not then strike readers as so strange when Landauer goes on to say that "no one is better suited to maintain a communist economy than true individualists. In fact, a communist economy can only be maintained by true individualists." Landauer's notion is that such people create a new people by which he means a people who are defined by new relationships between themselves because they are different. And so he says:

"*We demand that they act, that they secede, and that they unite. No theory will tell them what kind of relationships or what economic systems will be possible. They will learn from the historical moment, from their numbers, their values, their determination. If possible, they will found cooperatives and popular banks, as well as their own markets. They will form an economic alliance, because they are few, but also because they will want to experiment with mutual aid and respect, knowing that economy is a collective matter, just as spirituality is an individual matter.*"

What all this builds to, in a further article from *The Socialist* entitled "The Settlement", is a description of autonomous rural communities that Landauer envisages as the context for groups of appropriately spirited anarchists who have determined to live outside capitalism. Landauer bases the idea partly on his observances of other self-created communities, whether strictly communist or ones that survive by producing goods for sale in capitalist markets. What Landauer perceives as the difference in his idea, however, is that "We want to care about others; and we want them to care about us. In the midst of our country, in the midst of our people, we want to plant a pole and tell everyone who

can hear us: Look, here is a signpost – follow it!" Landauer's imagined communities, then, are not merely refuges for those who wish to depart from capitalist society but social outreach centres, community action hubs and signposts to a new future where people relate to each other in a completely different way articulated by new and different values. About this, Landauer has much to say:

"*Our people are the new people; they are the people and the culture that our spirit envisions. This also means that while, in a certain sense, we secede and precede for our own sake, we mainly do so for the sake of the way, for the sake of an ineradicable and deeply rooted desire, for the sake of what we have made the center of our being. We do not primarily separate for our comfort – we do it for us; in other words, for the revolution.*

This word – 'revolution' – truly helps to mark the line between us and the loners – those who do not aim at the whole and who do not understand that our movement must have a historical impact, that it must create a new spirit and new conditions; otherwise, it cannot be our movement. However, when we speak of revolution, we must also draw a line between ourselves and those who call themselves 'revolutionaries,' even if they are dormant or only half-awake and never do more than imagine and talk.

It can be of no great concern to us whether ten or fifty or one hundred and fifty men found a settlement, or how many new settlements will emerge in a given period of time. Our movement has centuries behind it, and now heads forward into future centuries. Some years here or there matter little. We are proud and secure enough to demand a new age; an age where people live in a beautiful and joyful world.

We want to directly link the production of consumer goods to the needs of the people. We want to create the basic form of a new, real, socialist, free, and stateless society, in other words, a community. However, we could use the help of everyone who desires socialism, even if they are not able to separate from the current social conditions as thoroughly as we are. They can find ways to support us even if they – at least for now – stay in their parties, unions, and cooperatives. They can help us create the example that we want to create. This will be a challenge and it will demand sacrifices."

As Landauer continues on explaining this it sounds rather like the ideas of Peter Kropotkin in *Fields, Factories and Workshops* or *The Conquest of Bread* (although Kropotkin frowned on the idea of small, self-contained communities himself for he imagined EVERYONE rising up and resetting the entire society). Landauer talks about "the socialist village" with:

"*workshops and village factories, with meadows and fields and gardens, with cattle and flocks and chickens – you big city proletarians, get used to the idea, as alien and strange as it may at first seem! This is the only remaining way to begin the realization of socialism. Socialism is the return to natural labour; it is a natural, multi-faceted connection of all activities; it is the union of intellectual and manual labour, of artisanry and agriculture, of education and work, of play and work.*"

Landauer comes to this conclusion because he is most convinced of all that anarchism can only come if there are actually anarchists who live different lives, who have separated themselves from capitalism and offer a lived, visible example that one can interact with that models the alternative arrangement of relationships. Anarchism for Landauer, at least in print, is a lived activity. And so:

"*There are many people today who see no alternative to the lives they live. This must change! Once the change has come, it will no longer be necessary to make your leisure hours as long as possible and haggle over every single one of them. Labour – and leisure – will become part of life's natural flow. Everyday life will be transformed. Your personalities will grow; like boulders, like mountains – high and strong! A new life will come. You will have hours to yourself, and you will share the hours that belong to everyone with the community. This community has to be created – for yourselves and for others. It does not mean that anyone will deprive you of your solitude, but that solitude will regain its rightful role: religion, ceasing to be what it has become today: a commodity.*"

As Landauer had said before in previous essays, then, what he wanted was pioneers prepared to be the first to engage in newly imagined and created "anarchist lifestyles" which were definitive breaks from capitalist ones and which modelled new human relationships. They were to "lay the ground of a new communal life — a ground from which beautiful and rich new individuals shall arise." And he was blunt about this for he conceded that such people "have to start from nothing". Yet it was also necessary for "No one has even attempted to begin yet; to realize socialism." He then finishes this essay with imperatives: "Seize, push, act! Make life a pleasure to live!"

The next article in this series propagandising for a new, anarchist way of life is titled "Socialist Beginning". It focuses really on means and ends and the Socialist Bund that Landauer was trying to fan into a flame. On the first topic Landauer says here that:

"*Means and ends are not to be distinguished if one pursues a real life, i.e., the realization of thought. It is an old mistake to impose an invented ideal, a blinding fantasy. It is an old mistake to name a goal, and then ask with resignation, 'What can we do to achieve it?' No*

worthwhile goals can ever lie ahead of us in some distant future. Our goals must lie behind us and push us forward. They have to drive and motivate us. We have to free ourselves from the apparitional and schematic notion that there can ever be complete socialism and that all that needs to be done is to remove the fine line between the social conditions of today and the social conditions we wish for. 'America is here – or nowhere!' Socialism is not an end that requires means. Socialism is action that carries its ends within itself."

This reasoning goes well with Landauer's ideas for "socialist villages" for he is saying that we must live now how we imagine everybody should live. It is, in this sense, a matter of prefigurative performance, using social anarchist thinking, or a more egoist "we are free by acting free". As with the violence he formerly discussed, Landauer never believes that you can get to what you want by acting or relating in ways that are not already demonstrations of it in the here and now. Thus, in this short essay, Landauer talks about going beyond calling for support and sympathy for the aims and ideals of The Socialist Bund to actually becoming a living, breathing, active Socialist Bund. He says: "What is required is that those of us who are committed, determined, and cheerful move to the centre of all those who want to leave the emptiness, confusion, and misery of random capitalist commodity production in order to reach reason and unity." The point here is that those so motivated and with the necessary spirit CREATE REALITIES rather than endlessly, and pointlessly, canvassing support or looking for those in sympathy with a reality made in material relationships which nobody ever actually creates. *Only the living, breathing organism is real; everything else is just talk.* Are we creating real, actual networks of communal living and mutual aid, of insurrectional attack against systematic coercion and exploitation — or are we just talking about it and "trying to drum up support"? What Landauer wants in his writing is that these ideas have life and such life is

only incorporated (literally: made bodily) into these ideas when they are manifested in real, lived, human relationships.

This vision is further reflected in the very short piece “Weak Statesmen, Weaker People” from June 1910 in which Landauer memorably, and most notably (for its probably his most quoted text), defines the state as “a social relationship, a certain way of people relating to another” that is destroyed and defeated simply by relating another way. This thought itself is fairly easy to see as modelled after La Boétie’s reflections on servitude where he imagined that the way to defeat a servitude that was acquiesced in was simply to stop acquiescing! Thus here Landauer exhorts “the masses” to come to the understanding that “they must flee the state and replace it” and that “they must build an alternative”. This is based exactly on thinking like La Boétie’s in which “The entire system would vanish without a trace if the people began to constitute themselves as a people apart from the state.” This is reasoning I obviously accept and, therefore, we must accept our responsibility:

“*The absolute monarch said: I am the state. We, who we have imprisoned ourselves in the absolute state, must realize the truth: we are the state! And we will be the state as long as we are nothing different; as long as we have not yet created the institutions necessary for a true community and a true society of human beings.*”

Now I have relayed all of this without reference so far to Landauer’s major work on anarchism, his 1911 text *Call to Socialism*. But, in truth, this text does not add much to these basic ideas, in my opinion. In the preface to the second edition, for example, written only months before his ghastly murder by right wing military thugs, Landauer is once more talking about “the transformation of social institutions, of property relations, of the

type of economy" and that "socialism must be built, erected, organised out of a new spirit". What he wishes to achieve is "permanent results" which seems to equate to a permanent state of newly created human relations lived out and practiced. Thus, "the only salvation is work, real work done, performed and organized by an unselfish, fraternal spirit. New forms of work must be developed, freed from a tribute payable to capital, ceaselessly creating new values and new realities, harvesting and transforming the products of nature for human needs. The age of the productivity of labour is beginning; otherwise we have reached the end of the line." Landauer is clear here that these new relations he wishes to see constructed are both the beginning of something new but also the destruction of capitalism for he wishes nothing less than that people come to find it inconceivable that they would ever hire out either themselves or their labour ever again on capitalist terms. Therefore:

"*Because socialism must commence and because the realization of spirit and virtue is never mass-like and normal but rather results only from the self-sacrifice of the few and the new venture of pioneers, socialism must free itself from ruin out of poverty and joy in work. For its sake we must return to rural living and to a unification of industry, craftsmanship and agriculture, to save ourselves and learn justice and community.*"

It is as a consequence of this that Landauer concludes: "Nothing lives but what we make of ourselves, what we do with ourselves. Creation lives; not the creature, only the creator. Nothing lives but the action of honest hands and the governance of a pure, genuine spirit." This Landauer conceives of as the association of people, men and women, of "communal spirit" that is union and freedom, an association of human beings that:

"*will be a people; it will be culture, joy. Who knows today what joy is? The lover when he contemplates his beloved with the feeling, indistinct or clear, that she is the quintessence of all that is life and creates life; the creative artist in a rare hour alone with a friend of like mind, or when in his mind and in his work he anticipates the beauty and fullness which will one day become alive in the people; the prophetic spirit; who hastens ahead of centuries and is sure of eternity. Who else knows joy today, who knows what complete, great, rapturous joy is?*"

Who indeed. Landauer thus speaks, overall, of a call to both love and joy in building a new society out of newly and freely constructed human relations that suit the purposes of those engaging in them free from arbitrary, overbearing or coercive restraint. Towards the end of *Call To Socialism* he consequently makes the following appeal:

"*I call on all those who want to do what they can to build this socialism. Only the present is real, and what men do not do now, do not begin to do immediately, they will not do in all eternity. The objective is people, society, community, freedom, beauty, and joy of life. We need men to give the battle-cry; we need all who are filled with this creative desire; we need men of action. This call to socialism is addressed to men of action who want to make the first beginning.*"

I close this discussion of Landauer's relational anarchism now by quoting the twelve articles (in their 1912 second edition form) he penned for his Socialist Bund which functioned as its programme and which give the most compact summary of Landauer's anarchism. Thereafter, I shall offer some concise reflections on what I have shared of Landauer's ideas.

1. Socialism is the creation of a new society.

2. Socialist society is a Bund of economically independent communities that exchange their goods fairly. The individuals of these communities are free in their personal matters, and voluntarily united in all that concerns the common good.

3. The Socialist Bund is destined to eventually replace the state and capitalism. It can only become a reality when active socialists organize their daily lives communally and exit the capitalist economy as far as their circumstances allow.

4. Socialist settlements will be prepared by communal consumption and by replacing the monetary economy with mutual credit. This will allow working people in independent communities to produce and exchange the products of their labour without the mediation of parasitic profiteers.

5. In the Socialist Bund, today's capital will be replaced by two social factors: a) institutions based on a connecting spirit and guaranteeing the satisfaction of the working people's needs (both with respect to production and consumption); these institutions and the spirit of mutuality will replace the usury and the emptiness of the monetary economy; b) land: land is a necessary requirement for any economy, capitalist or socialist; it belongs to nature in much the same way that the institutions belong to spirit.

6. The requirements for the true and all-encompassing creation of socialism among the peoples are expropriation and redistribution of land among independent communities; this must be based on principles of justice, on the true needs of the people, and on the understanding that there cannot be permanent land ownership.

7. To make the necessary transformation of land rights possible, the working people have to realize as great a degree of socialism as their numbers and their energy allow. They have to provide examples of socialist reality. This has to happen on the basis of a common spirit (the capital of us socialists) and its institutions.

8. As long as examples of socialism cannot be realized and lived, the hope for a transformation of social relations and property rights remains futile.

9. Socialism has nothing to do with state politics, demagogy, or the working class fighting for power. Neither is it reduced to the transformation of material conditions. It is first and foremost a movement of spirit.

10. Anarchy is just another – due to its negativity and frequent misinterpretation, less useful – name for socialism. True socialism is the opposite of both the state and the capitalist economy. Socialism can only emerge from the spirit of freedom and of voluntary union; it can only arise within the individuals and their communities.

11. The further socialism extends and the more it expresses the true nature of human beings, the faster men will turn away from the spiritless institutions that have led to oppression, stupidity, and pauperization. An all-encompassing social contract will replace authoritarian violence, and the Bund of free communities and associations – what we call society – will replace the state.

12. The creation of the Socialist Bund demands the proletarians' departure from the industrial towns and their resettlement in the country, where agriculture, industry, and artisanry will form a union, and the distinction between intellectual and physical labour

will be abandoned. Labour will be joyful and there will be a sense of belonging; this will allow us as individuals to form both communities and a people.

It falls to me now to write some commentary on what has been going on here with Gustav Landauer. First of all, I should point out that I was almost completely ignorant of him before researching this chapter. I had read the text I used as the quote at the head of this chapter but nothing further. Now, having read him much more extensively, I am struck by how like Émile Armand's ideas they are even though Armand was an individualist and Landauer a complicated socialist — thus I am sure that both might be somewhat nonplussed by that comparison. Landauer's anarchism, it seems to me, is a "Kropotkinism of Egoists" or a "social anarchism for Nietzscheans". His ideas combine the individual and the social as a necessary duality, each nourishing the other in a relational whole, and his organisational ideas are essentially an associationism that is appropriate to the problem to be addressed (world problems need world solutions, local problems need local ones, etc.). Landauer seeks to initiate a pioneer movement for new social relations and it seems both a conclusion and an assertion for him that this will necessarily not be a mass movement or a metanarratival idea for only very few could or would ever attempt to go against the direction of flow of their entire social, political, economic and moral context. (In this, I compare the application of Landauer's thought to that of Jesus' early followers in the gospels expected to wander around preaching the kingdom of God but without any money, possessions, etc. Jesus essentially initiated a new set of relations too — just as Landauer suggests here.)

In this, that Landauer is a pacifist and strongly anti-violence is important for Landauer is not a thinker who focuses simply on the immediate. He asks what the trajectory is imagined to be and where we want to go (as he says, motivated by his past beliefs and the

necessities they instill in him). For Landauer the equation is then simple: you cannot bomb and shoot your way to anarchy (as that propagandist of the deed, Alexander Berkman, will also come to agree in his later life when he writes his tract on anarchist communism) and so bombing and shooting is, ultimately, little more than frustration expressed through destruction. It is not a systematic way to actually achieve anything you want in relationship terms. I agree with Landauer on this but I do not agree, if it is Landauer's point, that there is never any point to any violence. Are people who are attacked simply to sacrifice themselves? That sounds like a willing suicide. So I see every motivation for defensive violence (this, indeed, seems prevalent in the wild), the only question being to then decide, in the nitty gritty of real life, what is defence and what goes over the line of defence into something else. I take seriously the idea that violence breeds only more violence and so by no means do I take this subject as something trivial.

Yet I find the concept of anarchist armies or security forces — as some talk about — both ridiculous and ethically dubious from an anarchist perspective. On the matter of defence, however, I have no qualms whilst also taking on board Landauer's view, born out of his concern to form new relationships with others, that violence always risks becoming either an authority in its own right (violence is, as he says, the weapon of the state) or a simple despotism of its own. Landauer's pacifism is, of course, to be set in the context of the rest of his views and of the culture and politics of the time when people were firing pistols and throwing home made bombs. This makes Landauer reflect, as it should, on who anarchism is actually for. Is anarchy for everyone (imagined as an ethos, practice or way to live a life)? Must an anarchist take their task as to evangelise the whole world for anarchy? Do we want a "world revolution" and is this a realistic ambition or just foolishness? Is the task of anarchism (the very idea of that is to pose the question that "anarchism" has a task) to proceed until everyone is an anarchist? Landauer seems not to think so and to

have come to the conclusion that, as an ethos, as an idea, as a set of practices and beliefs, anarchism will only ever be for a select group, if not “the few”. For him it is a matter of “spirit”, a consciousness, awareness or ethos which, by very definition, some people will not, will never, have. So Landauer seems to want to find and energise those people for whom this is a current actuality or a future possibility more than anything else. For Landauer anarchism is not a “benevolent imposition” upon the whole world and never could be (since this is a dictatorial, authoritarian idea). It is how people freely relate to one another, how they live and associate for themselves, something (we must conclude) that not everybody will ever be capable of. It is “inward colonization” and people “uniting in new forms of culture” but, as logic must dictate, this means that its different to what others are doing — or maybe will ever even want to do. After all, can the anarchist force relationships and ways of life onto people? That’s a serious question.

So Landauer distinguishes people by their “spirit” (his preferred term) which is their consciousness, their ethos (and so ethics), their virtue. His idea is that such people form their own communities (size here doesn’t really matter to him — its just a matter of whoever we can agree to unite with) which make material the connections of spirit and ethos that they share. These communities are then beacons shining in the dark that are meant to attract others to the light by their active, embodied energy and living connections based in anarchist living. He bases this, in turn, on the idea that people display something analogous to familial connections simply by existing in common as examples of the same species. It is also based in love for others, something which can be nurtured or discouraged by, and in, the actual lives we live. These are to be communities of new life and mutual enjoyment that naturally attract the interest of others because they are not isolationist in conception but still part of the wider world.

Yet we must remember that, for Landauer, all this finds itself on an intellectual foundation very much in egoist territory. Landauer conceives of certain kinds of self-organising people who are able to achieve such things. His usage of La Boétie's text, for example, tends in this direction too. Anarchism, for Landauer, is a matter of the relationships we do and don't consent to from ourselves. The anarchism, for him, as the kingdom of God for Jesus in Luke's gospel, chapter 17, is "within you" (as it was then too in Tolstoy's amalgamation of Christianity and anarchism) — as spirit, virtue, ethic, consciousness. It almost seems, in Landauer's spiritual anarchism, as if our lives are a matter of the understanding and utilising of the conditions of (our) existence when he talks of humans as "brothers" (and sisters), a relationship constituted of and by itself by the fact of our common existence alone. Landauer doesn't want anyone to ignore that fact and, instead, to concentrate on, and imagine, what it means and entails.

It is because of this, in fact, that Landauer's anarchism becomes not an activity of waiting for a future Utopia, revolution, or heaven come down to earth, but an activity of NOW, a changing of relationships NOW, an imagination and creation of a new NOW. His conception that this now must be built OUTSIDE CAPITALISM is, of course, entirely on point. Anarchy (now imagined as a deliberate activity, an act of will) must be built outside capitalism or it is just an identitarian adjunct to capitalism carried out by cowards for social media clout and societal caché by those who want to appear 'edgy' or 'cool'. Anarchy, in other words, must be real and consequential or it is just words. It must incorporate [literally: embody] wild anarchy into real relationships in real life. Ideas like Landauer's "active general strike" — if carried out — would begin to do this. So it is then entirely correct when Landauer says that what really matters is our willingness to change, live differently and engage in other relations with people than those to which we have become accustomed. Anarchy is CREATING NEW RELATIONS, CREATING NEW MATERIAL

REALITIES. And it is SELF-CREATED, SELF-ORGANISED, it is an action of SELF-EMANCIPATION. No wonder, then, that Landauer seems to imagine that egoists would make the best anarcho-communists!

But there is an issue in the midst of all this and it is one he fell out with his German colleague in The Socialist Bund, Erich Mühsam, about. As has already been mentioned, Landauer was himself quite socially conservative. He believed in the family as something his own ideas could and should be built on. Consequently, in the matters of "free love" and "The Woman Question" that circulated at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth that figures like Emma Goldman and Voltairine de Cleyre were much involved with elsewhere, he was on the side of those who found them distasteful if not actually corrupting of social conditions. Landauer seems to have found an emphasis on sex in the matter of human emancipation as a corruption of proper (or at least his) morals and the necessary social fabric. Thus, it was not unknown for Landauer to write articles in The Socialist, which he edited, that criticised free love as socially destructive and which praised the solidity given to society by the family unit, traditionally understood.

But not everyone, even of his own friends and colleagues, agreed with him. One who strongly disagreed was Erich Mühsam, an anarchist writer and playwright who would be arrested in 1919 when Landauer was murdered and serve 5 years in a Bavarian jail cell before being released in the amnesty that would also free Adolf Hitler after his Beer Hall Putsch of 1923. Thereafter, Mühsam would spend the last ten years of his life agitating for anarchist socialism in general terms of a kind very like Landauer's before falling foul of the rise of the Nazis who would first torture then murder him in a concentration camp north of Berlin (Mühsam, like Landauer, was also Jewish) in 1934. Mühsam's anarchist socialism before this time, and especially around the time of The Socialist Bund that

Landauer spoke about, seems to have been very much similar to that of Landauer. Mühsam himself went to Munich to try and rouse interest amongst the down and outs of the city for Landauer's Bund but he found that their interest was more in the free beer provided at meetings to drum up support for it than their intellectual and political content. One big difference between the views of Mühsam and Landauer, however, was on the issues of sexuality and the place of women.

One occasion for discord between the two was Landauer's writing of an article in The Socialist in 1910 which criticised free love on the back of a story about an aristocratic Russian woman, Maria Tarnowska, who was accused of inciting one of her lovers to murder a love rival. One imagines that the combination here of violence and sexual intrigue worked to exercise Landauer's gears mightily! In any case, he used the story to criticise free love as detrimental to society. Mühsam, however, a man who engaged in free love himself and believed in the rights of women over their own love lives (as opposed to their control by husbands or patriarchal attitudes), demurred from Landauer's views publicly in another article in The Socialist entitled "Women's Rights". In this short piece Mühsam argues that he would find it "problematic" if Landauer's views expressed in his article "Tarnowska" about the case of the Russian aristocrat were considered socialist. He continues:

"*it can never be the task of socialism to approach sexuality on the basis of Puritan morality. Sexual matters are of a very intimate nature, dependent on the personality and the feeling of the individual, and they can never be defined as depraved and ugly, nor as sick and decadent. Sexual intercourse is connected to sensations of lust. The ambition to reduce all human sexual activity to the purpose of reproduction can never be justified. Those who take such arguments seriously would have to demand that all infertile women be sexually*

abstinent. Furthermore, when dealing with this very difficult and delicate question, we must never forget that the exchange of physical sensations, the sharing of physical lust between humans is the strongest and most private expression of love. And love exists and expresses itself even when a weak constitution or other compelling reasons do not recommend procreation."

He then goes on to argue that it would be dubious in the extreme to argue for monogamy in sexual matters on the basis, which Landauer appears to have used, that human beings "have a monogamous disposition" (which suggests Landauer thought polygamy or multiple partners of any kind was corrupting of some material constitution he imagined human beings to have). Mühsam thus argues that "It is a completely arbitrary demand that people who are in close relationships should remain 'faithful' to one another" and points out that "There has hardly ever been a time during which marriage was a truly voluntary institution" — suggesting that marriage as an institution in itself may be something that contradicts a philosophy of emancipation. Mühsam goes on:

"*It is certainly true that love is free. However, it is also true that the freedom in the context of love must still be won–especially in the case of women. This makes 'free love' very much a woman's right; a right that seems more important than all of the political rights that do not help in any case–look at the men who already have them!*

Independence in the most intimate matters. Control over your own body, uninhibited by society's moral codes. Liberation from the public control of virginity. Uncompromising respect of women's humanity. These are women's rights for which we socialists must fight! Whether the increased freedom of women will have any impact on their sexual lives is of no concern to us."

A hint of what Mühsam was arguing against here is his quotation of Landauer as accusing the promoters of free love as being “controlled by degenerate, uprooted, and wild women”. One will, of course, immediately understand whose side I take here if one has been conscientiously reading this book up to this point. More to the point, however, is we have seen that Landauer had absolutely no problem talking about “love” as a motivating and even transforming factor in human existence, an intimate matter of the “spirit” he lauded. But it is now clear that this had not penetrated to voluntary human relations, including sexual relations, in the wider body of his thinking. I regard this as an unambiguous mistake on Landauer’s part, something he lacks which Émile Armand’s somewhat similar social construction of relationships labelled “amorous camaraderie” did not. So I agree with Mühsam in “Women’s Rights” that “The issue here is that women lack basic rights and that men must become active if they believe that the opposite sex also deserves freedom.” I also agree with Mühsam in this article when he says:

“*May [women] give birth to as many children as their motherly hearts desire! May they live lives that allow them to bless the people with strong, healthy, astute, and happy children! And may they choose as a father, as fathers, for their children whoever they want! …Once this is the case, then we can truly speak of women’s freedom and of women’s rights!*”

In other words, I reject Landauer’s conservatism here entirely and annul the traditional idea of family he stuck to, insisting this is no vital part of his wider ideas at all but merely a vestige of old thought he had not been able to imagine himself out of in the cause of a freedom of human relationships. The “creation of a new society” cannot possibly be based on old constructions of relationships but it must be a re-imagining and the new creation of a culture of what relationship and community even is – much as Foucault suggested in the chapter before this one. Freedom and emancipation from the old must

go all the way down and all the way up. This, in fact, is its only hope of not too easily falling back into old hierarchies and old coercions. As Mühsam would himself say in a further article, “Anarchy”, from his own publication *Kain* (named after one of the sons of the biblical Adam):

“*Anarchy is freedom from coercion, violence, servitude, law, centralization, and the state. An anarchic society rests on voluntariness, communication, contract, agreement, alliance, and people… [yet] the political life of the civilized peoples remains limited to conceiving ever more perfect reins, saddles, shafts, curbs, and whips. The working human being only distinguishes himself from the working horse by helping the master to develop ever better tools of bondage and by adjusting to them voluntarily… [therefore] The means to change conditions that you know are dreadful is action.*”

This action, however, cannot leave areas of human relationship unexamined or unchanged. Human relationships must be remade whole and entire. That includes the family and in the matter of sexuality and sexual relationships too. In fact, I would suggest that we take Landauer’s own figure of fraternal solidarity because we exist together as examples of the same species (which Mühsam repeats in “Anarchy”) as our marker here but, unlike Landauer has done, actually take it seriously in a thoroughgoing way — as when Mühsam says in “Anarchy” that:

“*Anarchy is the society of humans as brothers. Its economic alliance is called socialism. Humans who are brothers exist. Anarchy is alive whenever they come together. They need no domination. However, they still have to create socialism. This demands labour. Those who refuse to help create and to engage in socialist labour in brotherly communion, those who want to wait until things change without themselves lifting a finger, they may go on*

repairing and washing their dishes, they may go on complaining and voting–but they must not call themselves socialists! In particular, they must not speak of anarchy! Anarchy is a matter of the heart, and they know nothing of that."

Therefore, taking Landauer and Mühsam seriously as promoters of a genuine, all-encompassing, human, fraternal, loving solidarity, our conclusion on the matters of sexual and family relations must be as Mühsam concludes (if in liberal language) in a further short piece from *Kain* entitled "The Suffragette Amazons" which reads as follows:

"*As long as the personal lives of women are under the control of men; as long as chastity is expected from girls and seen as a virtue; as long as women's sexual activity outside of state-sanctioned marriage is considered debauched and immoral – as long as these realities remain in place, women will be subordinate to men and should not bother to make equality on a formal level their primary objective. A woman who is ashamed to be the mother of an illegitimate child can hardly claim entitlement to public office, for which spiritedness, independence, and responsibility are demanded. Women must first free themselves from the prejudices of a prudish morality and follow their own will in personal affairs, rather than the expectations of others.*"

Amen! Yet a question remains here and not just for Landauer: given this construction of a relational anarchism of those who set up their own communities of relations, why has it not worked? The answer is actually as Landauer diagnosed when he wrote about it: no one actually practices it. No one lives this life. Virtually no one is an actual, living anarchist (or part of an actual, living anarchist community of relationships or anarchist culture). Everyone (of course, there will always be exceptions) lives in some deliberate relation to capitalism — perhaps whilst telling others that they shouldn't be. So Landauer was

exceptionally right here: few indeed are those who ever do anything about it. That was his challenge, is my challenge and is the challenge of everybody who ever reads this sentence. Don't just read about it. Don't just think about it. DO IT! Incorporate it! Make it real, an actuality!

But, since this is the obvious corollary of those imperatives, what about the means? How? Landauer offered a couple of ways in the "active general strike" and the "autonomous rural community". I, however, offer you no means for it seems to me that a plan soon becomes a dogma. I always stick, first and foremost, to the "wild" idea that anarchy is SELF-EMANCIPATION. It is your own self-responsibility, autonomy and agency. So you should go right ahead and engage these faculties that you have in your own interests. Those who want to find a way will find a way. So I offer no plan and no templates and much less do I give you a dogma of what must be done. Anarchy, in my understanding, is the wild philosophy of "You figure it out". This is not said in a careless or unconcerned way (for it is genuinely said in and from love for those who want to be free) but in order to emphasise that anarchy is activating your own action in your own interest. It certainly does not deny you the opportunity to pool your talents, and join your minds, with those of others. As Landauer has argued, anarchy is itself a necessarily social phenomenon. But this also means its not about being told what to do for this does not encourage all of those virtues anarchists have come to value. The only real criterion here is that you engage in the creation of new relationships and new cultures in your own interests, ones destructive of our socially, economically, politically and morally coercive past in the pursuit of present and future ever-evolving emancipations. That is wild and that is what we must do and I'm convinced that those who have the spirit to do that already have all they need to put it into effect in their lives. Life, as I have stated before, is and should be self-organising.

11. Queer Nihilism

A Queer Introduction

The idea for this chapter began in reading some writing about “queer nihilism”. (Don’t worry, we will get to this later.) This seemed an extremely interesting and relevant subject to discuss in relation to my interest in “the wild” in the context of anarchy. But I didn’t know exactly where to start. Of course, I had done my usual due diligence in searching for appropriate literary sources and other material with which I could interact in the hope of stimulating some ideas but no such ideas were immediately forthcoming. And so it was that I eventually stumbled across the 1981 book *Polysexuality* published by Semiotext(e) and edited by Francois Peraldi. This text was not immediately appealing to me coming, as it did, with a cover featuring the image of a leather clad (assumedly gay and certainly gay friendly) biker on the front cover who was wearing no pants astride a motorcycle. When it comes to sex and sexuality I would say that the figure of the butch gay man is probably that which, to date, has been the least appealing to me. (Edit: this is not true. The least appealing is the heterosexual married man. Mr Normal.)

Inside the covers did not seem much more attractive either. The text was 44 years old, written stylistically all in caps and a poor quality reproduction of the original text. It was also full of the writing of old (and often now dead) people even if I had heard of some of them. (Deleuze and Guattari, Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Georges Bataille, Pierre Klossowski and William S. Burroughs are all in there.) I don’t know what I was expecting the subject matter to be about in my quite naive way but I certainly

got a shock when I eventually found myself starting to read (after a few initially abortive attempts). The book is arranged, as the title might suggest, according to many types of sex. Specifically, these are:

1. Self Sex
2. Soft Sex
3. Alimentary Sex
4. Sex of the Gaze
5. Ambiguous Sex
6. Animal Sex
7. Child Sex
8. Morbid Sex
9. Violent Sex
10. Corporate Sex
11. Discursive Sex
12. Philosophical Sex
13. Critical Sex

Each heading encompasses the inclusion of a few, often relatively short, pieces related to the subject of that section. And clearly, just from reading that list, the opportunity to go sexually "off piste" (into madness if not death) is wide open and begging to be taken. The book does not disappoint. It is opened with this brief introduction and orientation from Peraldi:

"*POLYSEXUALITY IS NOT ONLY A SET OF TEXTS WRITTEN BY CAREFULLY CHOSEN AUTHORS AND ILLUSTRATING THE PLURAL ASPECTS OF SEXUALITY.*

POLYSEXUALITY IS A TEXT IN ITSELF, THE EDITORS OF WHICH ARE THE AUTHORS. LET'S CALL IT A COLLAGE OR A TEXTUAL PATCH-WORK, IF YOU PREFER.

IT TELLS WHAT THE REALITY OF SEX HAS ALWAYS BEEN WITH RESPECT TO ITS ALIENATION TO 'USURA' AND EXPLOITATION.

IT ALSO POINTS TOWARD THE 'REAL OF SEX' WHICH STILL LIES UNTOUCHED, UNTHOUGHT OF, BUT PERHAPS ALLUDED TO BY FREUD WHEN HE SUGGESTED THAT LIBIDO HAD NO GENDER.

LIBIDO: AN IRREPRESSIBLE 'VOLONTE DE JOUISSANCE' (WILL TO PLEASURE) NEVER PURE SINCE IT IS ALWAYS LINKED TO THE DEATH DRIVES TO THE POINT THAT FOR SOME RIGOROUS SEEKERS, 'JOUISSANCE' CULMINATES IN DEATH: THE ULTIMATE SEX.

IF LIBIDO IS THE ORGANIZING FORCES OF ALL ACTIVITIES LEADING TO 'JOUISSANCE,' ALL THESE ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING WRITING ABOUT SEX AND 'JOUISSANCE,' HAVE TO BE CONSIDERED AS IMAGES OF THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DEATH DRIVES.

THE DEATH DRIVES, WHICH CENTRIFICATE POLITICS, HAVE BEEN PRESENTIFIED IN THIS TEXT BY IMAGES OF POLITICAL DISASTERS, MASSACRES, GENOCIDES, CRIMES OF WAR: OUR DAILY LOT. THE THEORY OF CATASTROPHIES IS AT THE VERY CORE OF THE THEORY OF POLITICS AND IT HAS TO BE THOUGHT OF AS GIVING SHAPE TO THIS OTHER SIDE OF LIBIDO.

FROM COVER TO COVER, THIS WHOLE ISSUE IS NOTHING ELSE, IN OUR OPINION, THAN THE TEXTUAL WORKING THROUGH OF THIS THESIS. WE CALL IT TEXTUAL, BECAUSE LANGUAGES, OF COURSE, CONSTITUTE THE THIRD SIDE OF LIBIDO, AND DEATH DRIVE, BY KNOTTING THEM TOGETHER AND MAKING THEM TANGIBLE, SYMBOLICALLY OR SEMIOTEXTUALLY SPEAKING."

Reading, I find all this intriguing if not exactly enlightening. I who am, at best, but a dilettante when it comes to the vagaries of French theory. (The book is not exclusively an example of this but it contains a good deal of content coming from such a source. And, of course, the key term, here as it will be elsewhere, is the rather untranslatable JOUISSANCE.) And so I dig in, scrolling from piece to piece until something catches my attention enough to start going in. There is a lot of talk of "perversion" – both as an explicit subject and by being exampled. There are a lot of (exposed) bodies. (Indeed, there is an easy viscerality throughout the book.) One begins to imagine that, within these covers, the cultural blinkers are off and "the rules" no longer apply. A story, which seems to originate from sub-Saharan Africa, relates to someone who admits to deliberate killings of adults and children whilst possessed by a demon (in a way that seems to have an erotic undertone). There is a poem (indeed, a sonnet) to the asshole. There is (inevitably) shit talking (and, later, pissing on people, alive and dead). Next comes interracial voyeurism. Men become wordy about being, or becoming, women, something of which we might say they have no personal experience (as if "being or becoming woman" were a specific experience all actual women [whatever that means] can, or have to, go through.)

Each section seems to plunge into even wilder madness (is it even fantasy?) and to take us even further away from the rhetorical safety, and arbitrary sexual simplicities, of mainstream rationality. By the mid-point of the text the subjects are "animal sex" and "child sex" and few have the simple courage required for even imagining such things – such is the chilling effect of the ubiquitous sex police. (No animals or children were harmed in the writing of this chapter.) Images of erect dogs and bare young buttocks, innocent in their matter-of-fact description, are inscribed in words and they have no perceptible sexual effect upon me. But I am minded to wonder if they do upon the

authors (which in the “Child Sex” section includes a short story by William S. Burroughs, transgressive writer, and man of moral ambiguity, par excellence) and I then wonder if I am supposed to be thoroughly disapproving of this type of thing even though there is no one (shortly to be one person) who knows that I am even reading this book, let alone what it contains, what I think about it or how my body responds to it. The sex police are in my head too. Should I want to get them out in order to be queer and wild? Perhaps, considering I am already reading this book, I have already gone out into the wild beyond the policed zone?

Next comes sex and death (or even sex with the dead?), sex and violence (sometimes self-administered, sometimes not, but always a matter of the pleasure of pain) and “corporate sex” in which a power relation such as master and slave or some other formal arrangement plays its part in proceedings. Here people play roles and that is what counts – that they play their part. Like an unspoken contract. (“You will piss and shit when I tell you to.” “Make me feel like an animal.” All rounded off with incomprehensible framing about “Oedipal facts” from Jacques Lacan.) And then a quiz! A quiz! Do you know the real names “for what some may call ‘perversions’?” It turns out I mostly do, one or two old and outdated terms aside. I have even engaged in some. You get marks for a correct answer but there is no scale for judging how “polysexual” you might seem to be. One of the descriptions is “A person who is sexually stimulated by wearing the clothing of the opposite sex”. Two images simultaneously shoot through my being as I contemplate that description. One is a teenage me dressed up in girl’s clothing on a school geography field trip. I was sent to my room without dinner for that. The second is of the warm thong of my best (read: only) friend pressed against her lithe, sweaty and athletic crotch and my desire to remove it, smell its aroma deeply (something, post-Covid, I can no longer do) and then pull it up over my legs until it cups my rapidly engorging cock. The thought of

that fabric against me, parting my ass cheeks behind and pressing against my erect phallus in front, is exhilarating. I linger in the moment. And precisely because its hers and because its so inappropriate to me in the eyes of unimaginative normality that knows not the jouissance of wild bodies:

"*PERVERSION.*

'PERVERSION, QUITE SIMPLY, IS A WAY OF BEING HAPPY.'

IN THE FRAGMENT FROM WHICH THIS PHRASE IS TAKEN. I CITED THE WORD 'PERVERSION' AFTER TWO ALLUSIONS TO HASHISH AND HOMOSEXUALITY. WHICH MEANS THAT HERE 'PERVERSION' DOES NOT HAVE A PSYCHOANALYTIC RIGOUR – SINCE FOR PSYCHOANALYSIS DRUGS ARE NOT STRICTLY CLASSABLE AS PERVERSIONS. PERVERSION IS THE SEARCH FOR PLEASURE THAT CANNOT BE TURNED TO THE PROFIT OF SOCIAL ENDS OR THE SPECIES. IT IS, FOR EXAMPLE, THE PLEASURE OF LOVING WHICH DOES NOT FIGURE IN VIEW OF PROCREATION. IT BELONGS TO AN ORDER OF VOLUPTUARIES PRACTISED GRATUITOUSLY. THE THEME OF PRODIGALITY." (Roland Barthes)

A thought occurs. I should ask my friend about this. (I often do this. It must wear on her getting these quite regular random questions but if it does she never says so.) And so I ask her:

"*Two related questions: have you ever partaken in an outrageous sexual activity and, secondly, have you ever done anything sexual you subsequently regretted morally?*"

Her answer astounds me for all the wrong reasons:

"'*Probably' is the short answer. I mean, I am not sure I consider my sexual activities as 'outrageous' but they were probably considered as such. Like I wouldn't tell my sisters. And, yes, I regret morally some other of my sexual activities - I have knowingly and unknowingly had sex with married men. And I regret it. I regret being part of the hurt caused to another."*

Is it just me? I feel repelled, in the light of what I have been reading, by how bland this is – not least because I know this woman has engaged in kink with both men and women (and even to a certain degree with me as I remember a video she sent me of her performing naked with a big carving knife she took from her kitchen, running the blade over her skin before fucking herself with the handle). Her answer seems completely bourgeois to me after all I know about her (and I am certain I don't know even the half of it) that what stands out when asked for something 'outrageous' is "heterosexual sex". "Is that the best you could do?" I think to myself. I wonder what to make of it that my closest friend thinks upsetting someone's wife in their clearly insufficient coupling arrangement is regret worthy. She is not even the one who is married (she is against marriage for herself and procreation too) so why is it her problem if married men want to engage elsewhere as well? Does she not simply have a concern for her own pleasure and to let others worry about theirs? In her reaction I see evidence of both moral boundaries and guilt that has been completely lacking as I surfed the pages of *Polysexuality*. My friend feels guilty for causing (imagined?) pain whereas in the book I am reading people are more likely either to be causing it on purpose or seeking it out with equal motivation.

My body, however, has other ideas. Or, rather, my mind-body does. For I am gaining a strong erection fast at the idea that this woman, my friend, fucks (better: fucked) married men. I wish I could see. I wish I could see whilst wearing her used thong. I wish I could see the whole thing from first interaction to sweaty consummation. I wish I could lick her

clean when she was done and enjoy the taste of guilt all over her that has sweated out from every morally affected pore. I wish that on her regular runs she would stop to fuck random strangers (some of them no doubt married – not that she would care) and that I could once more lick her clean all over her damp, guilt-ridden body every time she returned home. And as I wish my erection grows to rock hard insistence. I begin to stroke as I find photos of her to look at, ravenously. My JOUISSANCE is loud and voluminous.

From Polysexuality to Queer Theory

What is queer? I propose to answer this by turning to the essay which is the reason I sought out *Polysexuality* in the first place. That is Guy Hocquenghem's essay "To Destroy Sexuality" which I propose is one of the founding essays of Queer Theory. Throughout the essay a statement is seeded at various points. When you put it together you get:

"*To put an end to the slaughter of the body. To escape from the sedentary. To destroy sexuality. To get rid of programmed training. To liberate energies.*"

This, I propose, is queer. But what does it mean? I personally think it is more queer to ask "What does it do?" but I will accede to the first question (first of all) if I must.

In "To Destroy Sexuality" Guy Hocquenghem posits that both the body and its desires are locked up in a deliberately incarcerating prison of material relationships. The simple name for this is the first he uses in his first sentence: "the capitalist order". This order, according to Hocquenghem:

"*has always controlled life through its expressive, sexual, emotional and affective aspects, constraining it to the dictates of its totalitarian organisation based on exploitation, private property, male dominance, profit and profitability. It exercises this control under all of its various guises: the family, schools, the workplace, the army, rules, discourse. It unfailingly pursues its abject mission of castrating, oppressing, torturing, and mangling the body, all the better to inscribe its laws upon our flesh, to rivet into our consciousness its mechanisms for propagating slavery.*"

An idea is at play here. This idea is that the body – and its desires – should be free but (now moving to the second paragraph) "the capitalist state" cannot allow this experience of embodied existence to occur for such experience of existence is inimical to the capitalist state's interests. Consequently:

"*The capitalist state uses retention, stasis, scarification and neurosis to impose its norms and models, imprint its characters, assign its roles, promulgate its programs... It permeates our bodies, forcing its roots of death deep into our smallest crevices. It takes over our organs, robs us of our vital functions, mutilates our pleasures, harnesses all of our 'life' productivity under its own paralysing administration. It turns each of us into a cripple, cut off from his own body. A stranger to his own desires.*"

(Why am I thinking about my friend now, a person who will willingly concede to me that the most important thing in her life is her work, that being the thing she organises her life around? And is it mere coincidence that she has, in recent times, become asexual?) Now, in the third paragraph, referring to "the forces of capitalist occupation", Hocquenghem continues that such forces:

"*continually refine that system of aggression, provocation, extortion so as to use it along with a massive reinforcement of social terror (individual guilt) to repress, exclude and neutralise all those practices of our will that don't reproduce these forms of domination… reducing the 'subject' to a guilt-ridden, neurotic, industrious being, little more than a manual labourer.*"

(Fuck me. Is a gay, dead, French philosopher describing my friend in her regret over past sex and her very work-fixated present? Has the capitalist prison of incarcerating relationships simply reproduced itself in her, rearranging her body and its desires [or noticeable lack of them] in and as the process?)

Hocquenghem makes the point repeatedly that the capitalist point of attack is precisely THE BODY and it is not insignificant that this includes its desires for material desire hardly actualises according to a logic of economic capitalisation. Desire, particularly sexual desire, simply wants what it wants in accordance with a pleasure principle – and it is certainly close kin to both madness and death in that. Is not the orgasm called "the little death"? Have you never dreamt or imagined being consumed entirely by that feeling of sexual ecstasy beyond all reason and with no hope of finding your way back? Even as I write it I want it right now and to get lost in it forever. And that as I remember a waking dream I once had of being confronted, and fucked, by Dionysos himself as multiple vaginas manifested all over my body.

But how to achieve this liberty of the body and its desire? Hocquenghem conceives of it as: "Free(ing) the space – the context, the locus – of the body and its own specific desires from this 'foreign' grip... towards the liberation of social space." The logic explaining this is simple:

"*There is no separation between the two: I oppress myself because this 'I' is the product of a system of oppression operating across all forms of experience. A 'revolutionary consciousness' is nothing but a chimera as long as it remains outside of a 'revolutionary body,' a body which generates its own freedom. Here we find women revolting against the power that has been inseminated in their bodies for centuries; homosexuals revolting against the terrorising fascism of normality; adolescence revolting against the pathological authority of adults. They have begun, collectively, to open up the body's space to subversion and to open up the space of subversion to the 'immediate needs of the body'.*"

As a subtext to all this it seems reasonable to infer that libidinous freedom of the sort desired here, and the freedom to incarcerate, oppress, torture and exploit that is its enemy, are related – perhaps even opposite sides of the same coin or forms powered by a similar source of energy. I have already suggested (and certainly not originally) that sex and death are related. (*Polysexuality*, as we have seen, begins by linking sex with "death drives" in what is clearly a theory of psychoanalytic origin. Elsewhere it is suggested that one can choose either socially constructive sex or socially destructive death but not both.)

So there is the death that you can desire from within as a movement of jouissance that comes from an abundance of life and there is the death that is imposed upon you from without as an incarcerating denial of life in its fullest sense that takes jouissance away – and they are not the same death even if the end result is similar. Consequently, Hocquenghem can speak authentically when he heralds:

"*a great uprising of life against all of the manifestations of death which continually insinuate themselves into our body, ever more subtly binding our energies, desires, reality to the imperatives of the established order.*"

This sounds in my ears as similar to a Nietzschean theme for the "Polish nobleman" is certainly interested in "a great uprising of life" even if sex itself appears an actual stranger to him. Nietzsche seemingly always found other ways to express, and discuss, life's impulsive, and propulsive, forces. It would take Sigmund Freud to sexualise them. By the time we get to Hocquenghem 100 years after Nietzsche started to write we find they are vital forces, the very substance of us, and so entirely necessary to our existence:

"*We can no longer stand by idly while we are robbed of our mouths, our anuses, or sexual members, our guts, our veins... just so they can turn them into parts for their ignominious machine which produces capital, exploitation and the family. We can no longer stand idly by while they control, regulate and occupy our mucous membranes, the pores of our skin, the entire sentient surface of our body. We can no longer stand idly by while they use our nervous system as a relay in the system of capitalist, federal, patriarchal exploitation, nor while they use our brain as a means of punishment programmed by ambient power. We can no longer not 'come' or hold back our shit, our saliva, our energy according to their laws with their minor, tolerated infractions. We want to explode the frigid, inhibited, mortified body that capitalism wants so desperately to make out of our living body.*"

Here is where it starts to get interesting and where the title – To Destroy Sexuality – becomes relevant. For, all Hocquenghem says being taken as read, there are numerous tasks here. Our very selves (formed, as they were, in and by the capitalist cultural and political forces Hocquenghem wishes to annihilate) must be transformed from within. This is something I have discussed at length in the past (influenced very much by *V for Vendetta*) as an aspect of anarchising ourselves (perhaps, in the current context, better described as "wilding" ourselves). We must escape from what Hocquenghem describes as "the sedentary" which sounds like the frozen death of capitalist relations. Again, this can

be seen as an act of wilding. But we must also learn, so it seems, to become bodies and beings of will and desire or, as Hocquenghem puts it, “cross the spaces of a limitless body; live in the willful mobility beyond sexuality, beyond the territory and repertory of normality.” This is an interesting description for it posits “sexuality”, in form and use, very much as a pattern – and necessarily a pattern one must not deviate from. (Every social conservative, or victim of a social conservative, should be familiar with this concept.) What’s more, it is clear it is “the capitalist order’s” pattern. It is the shape of our incarceration. Consequently, Hocquenghem can speak of “the vital need to free ourselves ‘together’ from the grip of the forces that oppress and repress our desires” and a “plan to take our personal, intimate life experiences and confront them, explore them, live them collectively." This will all be in contradiction of the pattern of “sexuality” – and to sexuality as pattern.

This involves, however, not mere subversion, much less simple disobedience. According to Hocquenghem it requires not “simply breaking down this official sexuality as one would break down the condition of one’s imprisonment within any structure.” Rather:

“*we want to destroy it, to get rid of it because in the final analysis it functions as an infinitely repeating castration machine designed to reproduce everywhere and in everyone the unquestioning obedience of a slave.*”

These are strong words but Hocquenghem has more in regard to “sexuality” when he judges what it encourages is just as bad as what it denies and obstructs. For what it promotes in Hocquenghem’s view is:

"*the extension of 'eroticism' through advertising to all social life... (in order to) increase the efficiency of the 'reproductive' function of the official libido. Rather than reduce sexual discontent, these practices in fact extend the realm of frustration and 'lack' that facilitates the transformation of desire into a compulsive consumerism and guarantees the creation of demand.*"

Or, in other words, you get the "Only Fans-isation" of sex, sex as commodity for the consumer, sex as product, sex to order and off the shelf, the sex of interminable online forums where almost always men trade, swap, discuss and barter "sexual content". This is not a relationship determined by bodies and their desires in freedom but rather coerced and captured relations, relations of exploitation, replication and reproduction. The body is here no longer the source of desire but has been entranced and trained to reproduce the dictates of capitalism. Roll up, roll up! This does not reveal nor energise the body and its desires, it is not truly enabling or freeing. Rather, it hides it and proscribes the body and particularly those of its desires which seem out of bounds. It says how the body and its desires must be seen and what about them is, or is not, of value. Rather than autonomy, such in your face control produces slaves to the order of an economy. Henceforth, your pleasure shall be as those prescribed by "capitalist sexualities" and you must not deviate from this pattern. Hocquenghem, however, despises such "programmed training". He wants to "free, release, unfetter and relieve this living body so as to free all of its energies, desires, passions..." and to experience a "full complement of pleasure". He continues: "we want to rediscover the pleasures of vibrating, humming, speaking, walking, moving. Expressing ourselves. Raving, singing – finding pleasure in our body in all ways possible."

He also wants to fundamentally eradicate “guilt” for our desires and bodily pleasures “that for thousands of years has been at the root of all oppression”. This is the idea that certain forms of relationship or activities can be shameful or something about which one should be coerced to feel guilty (or otherwise find that that guilt has been reproduced in them as people who have been subjected to capitalism). Fundamentally, Hocquenghem (who was expelled from the French Communist Party for being homosexual) makes the point that capitalism, and all its subsets such as the family, schools, law, etc., are not, and should not, be the arbiters of these things. As such, the redrawing of social and political life he envisions is thoroughgoing:

“*We are keenly aware that liberating the body for sensual, sexual, affective and ecstatic relationships is inseparably linked to liberating women and destroying male dominance and role models – especially sexual role models. It is likewise linked to destroying all forms of oppression and ‘normality’. We want to be rid of all roles and identities based on the phallus. We want to be rid of sexual segregation. We want to be rid of the categories of man and woman, gay and straight, possessor and possessed, greater and lesser, master and slave. We want instead to be transsexual, autonomous, mobile and multiple human beings with varying differences who can interchange desires, gratifications, ecstasies, and tender emotions without referring back to tables of surplus value or power structures that aren’t already in the rules of the game.*

We have begun and shall continue to produce a new societal reality in which the greatest ecstasy combines with the greatest consciousness... We have reunited ‘political’ practice with the reality of the body... This is the only approach that can truly strengthen us against a system of domination that continually expands its powers of weakening and moulding the individual to its axioms, affiliating him to its order of dogs.”

When Hocquenghem says “transsexual” here, as you may have interpreted for yourself, he does not simply mean another kind of ideologically ossified person with a set gender and sexuality, one more classification of human to set on the shelf beside the others. As his subsequent words indicate, he is imagining “mobile and multiple human beings”, polymorphous sexual shapeshifters in a context of grand intercourse, a rhizomatic diversity of human sexual experience and interaction. What today is called “fluidity”.

From Queer Theory to Queer Nihilism

We have, so far, been twisting and turning our way through various queer rhetorics (and we have much more of them to go yet). Our journey now brings us to Baedan: *Journal of Queer Nihilism*, the first of three (all queer and all nihilistic) journals provided by the mysterious “Baedan” which, as a signifier, we are told is an old English forerunner of the modern English word “bad” meaning, in its ancient verbal form, “to defile”, derivative meaning “effeminate man, hermaphrodite, pederast”. Evidently the author(s) are laying out their credentials for their readers. They are queer, heretic and heterodox, wilful defilers and saboteurs of orthodoxy. As if this were not obvious, this particular journal is illustrated with the art of Aubrey Vincent Beardsley, an erotically obsessed English artist of the late Victorian period. The contents page of the *Journal of Queer Nihilism*, for example, contains the illustration of a quite devilish figure of indeterminate sex and gender (they have both an exposed penis and testicles but also breasts, their face is androgynous) surrounded by vegetation. Two lit candles are before them as is a kneeling figure with wings (also naked) who seems to have their hands before them in a pose of devotion. What, the reader might ask, is one supposed to be devoted to here? It would seem something lascivious, desiring, physical – and subversive.

The *Journal of Queer Nihilism* is, in a way that should seem obvious, about "queer nihilism". In fact, it is about using queer (which encompasses both queer thinking [i.e. queer theory] and queer politics [which is anti-political in every way imaginable]) as a negative or negating force or tool which leads to nothing precisely because it is purposefully destructive as is the perceived necessity of the moment (which is to destroy the controlling apparatuses and relations which have been built all around us as a controlling and exploiting situation). Thus, the authors say quite clearly:

"*We are interested... in a praxis through which queer theory and queer revolt are fused in an elaboration of active nihilism, of anti-politics.*"

This nihilistic interpretation of queer is reasoned as well for it is the belief of the authors that our situation is one in which the controlling forces can simply assimilate and utilise any positive ideology, movement or relation. And almost anything can be assimilated and domesticated in this way (not least queers as many assimilationist, and assimilated, queers can evidence). Here we see, of first importance, that queer is nothing so positively shallow as a "sexuality" (as Hocquenghem had already suggested and as he will do again in the theory of Baedan) – but it is ethical and political in general terms, this then motivating its negativity. Indeed as Baedan quote the trans political theorist Jack Halberstam:

"*Negativity might well constitute an anti-politics but it should not register as apolitical.*"

Baedan themselves are clear that this means "we define our anti-politics as refusing all political logic: representation, mediation, dialogue with power." More than the first half of *Journal of Queer Nihilism* is taken up with an extended and connected essay (in three

parts) fleshing out this “queer nihilism”, its motivations and consequences. To do this it majorly interacts with queer theorist Lee Edelman’s book *No Future*, a book itself about queer negativity but one that is taken up only in order to push beyond its bounds and reveal Edelman himself as a limp academic liberal without the fire or the insight to really head out into the positively destructive void. From the third line of their text Baedan are clear that “queerness means the refusal of society and not any negotiation with or within it” (it is, I muse, like the wild in this) and so Edelman the academic can be sure that this means the end of his job pumping out what Baedan describe as “safe interpretations offered by the academy” (safe, that is, for academics, professors, and those who employ them, who must not become so agitated by their work that they fire them or otherwise curtail their careers). Baedan, to the contrary and not least in their use of Edelman’s *No Future*, “embark on an elaboration of queer negativity that means nothing less than the destruction of the civilized world.” What they seek is fuel for “anti-social projects”.

Even Baedan notes, however, that Edelman’s academic project in *No Future* is a negative one. It is one against the notion of “positive queer identity” which is the version of “queer as sexuality” which capitalist authoritarianism (our political-economic ideology du jour) is eager to categorise, assimilate and assign its disciplined place. Thus:

“*There is no positive queerness that isn’t already a site of society’s reproduction. The positivist institutions of queerness—its dance parties, community projects, activist groups, social networks, fashion, literature, art, festivals—form the material structure of civilization. Whatever antagonism or difference these forms possess is thoroughly re-made in capital’s image; all value extracted, all danger neutralized. To our horror, queerness becomes the avant-garde of marketplaces and the dynamic life blood of the advanced postmodern economy.*”

It is because such positive queerness (like any other positive program, thing or idea) can and will be so easily assimilated that queerness must become negative, nihilistic, and lead to nothing. It cannot reinforce or justify "positive social value" (as Edelman puts it). Baedan parse this by saying of themselves:

"*we are not interested in a social project of queerness, in queer contributions to society, in carving out our own ghettos within the material and symbolic structures of capitalist life. Rather, our engagement with queer theory must be attuned to locating the moments which reveal the potential undoing of society, its structures and its relations.*"

Queer, then, must be negative, anti-society, as this society judges it and can make use of it. It is then on a clear and deliberate collision course with it. This will be helped in that society itself has an inherent anti-queer, fascist thread running through it anyway which goes right back to the biblical idea of "Sodomites" as "symbol(s) of civilization's decadence and imminent annihilation". There are, remarkably, even at the end of 2025 as I write this down, still people who think that sex between certain kinds of people, or sex involving certain kinds of entirely consensual sex acts, is sex that is completely destructive of civilised human society itself. Edelman, indeed, quotes such attitudes when he quotes someone saying, apparently in all seriousness, that:

"*acceptance or indifference to the homosexual movement will result in society's destruction by allowing civil order to be redefined and by plummeting ourselves, our children and grandchildren into an age of godlessness. Indeed, the very foundation of Western Civilization is at stake.*"

This is important to Edelman (and is integrated into the argument of Baedan) because, in Edelman's argument, "civilised society", civilisation itself, is oriented around the figure of "The Child" in the cause of what is termed "reproductive futurity". ("The Child must always name the horizon and the beneficiary of every political project.") You, like I, presumably live in this society so you are well used to all kinds of bullshit being premised on "the children" and the implicit replication and reproduction of ourselves and our values in and through them. ("The Child" has little to do with actual children of course. Its merely symbolic of the desire to endlessly proliferate and replicate exactly this society.) What Edelman says, however, and what Baedan take up in a more radical and consequential way, is that we should prove this anonymous prophet of Western Civilisation's demise right. Queer SHOULD be a threat to "civil order". It SHOULD threaten the heteronormative, patriarchal "reproduction of futurity". It SHOULD partake in "a liberatory conspiracy between the enemies of society". We should not want to in any way affirm, collaborate with, or assimilate with, any society which seeks, as of its DNA, to coerce and control us, exploit us, incarcerate us. We should not want status or representation within it. We SHOULD be committed entirely to its destruction and erasure. Queer and capitalism, queer and authoritarianism, cannot and SHOULD NOT go.

This certainly gives some queers, as also some anarchists, pause for thought – as Baedan note. Amongst those for whom these terms are liberal identifications – and assimilationist ones at that – the problem becomes that the queer nihilist is offering no positive alternative. I hope I have already suggested exactly why they can't (it will only be coopted, assimilated, turned against itself and put to capitalist use instead). Baedan themselves make it clear that they have no alternative to offer, no positive image of a utopia from some liberal leftist's "solarpunk" book of fantasies to aim for. Their stance is that anything like this you offer is only yet more fuel for Leviathan. The queer task, in their mind, is

rather to be a total destruction, an infinite sabotage operation. And that is no small task. Their summary justification for this is simple and honest:

"*Our daily life is so saturated and structured by capital that it is impossible to imagine a life worth living, except one of revolt.*"

Consequently:

"*We understand destruction to be necessary, and we desire it in abundance. We have nothing to gain through shame or lack of confidence in these desires. There cannot be freedom in the shadow of prisons, there cannot be human community in the context of commodities, there cannot be self-determination under the reign of a state. This world—the police and armies that defend it, the institutions that constitute it, the architecture that gives it shape, the subjectivities that populate it, the apparatuses that administer its function, the schools that inscribe its ideology, the activism that franticly responds to its crises, the arteries of its circulation and flows, the commodities that define life within it, the communication networks that proliferate it, the information technology that surveils and records it—must be annihilated in every instance, all at once. To shy away from this ask, to assure our enemies of our good intentions, is the most crass dishonesty. Anarchy, as with queerness, is most powerful in its negative form.*"

And all the while, so Baedan after Edelman report, "society", "civilisation", will be working to locate, categorize and assimilate, or otherwise neutralise, "the enemy within" that *No Future* identifies with "the death drive", a psychoanalytically explained "constant eruption of disorder from within the symbolic order itself", the "unnameable and inarticulable

tendency for any society to produce the contradictions and forces which can tear that society apart." Baedan can also locate this idea in Foucault's work, nothing that:

"*Foucault's work is foundational to queer theory in part because of his argument that power must create and then classify antagonistic subjectivities so as to then annihilate any subversive potential within a social body. Homosexuals, gangsters, criminals, immigrants, welfare mothers, transsexuals, women, youth, terrorists, the black bloc, communists,extremists: power is always constructing and defining these antagonistic subjects which must be managed. When the smoke clears after a riot, the state and media apparatuses universally begin to locate such events within the logic of identity, freezing the fluidity of revolt into a handful of subject positions to be imprisoned, or, more sinisterly, organized. Progressivism, with its drive toward inclusion and assimilation, stakes its hope on the social viability of these subjects, on their ability to participate in the daily reproduction of society. In doing so, the ideology of progress functions to trap subversive potential within a particular subject, and then to solicit that subject's self-repudiation of the danger which they've been constructed to represent. This move for social peace fails to eliminate the drive, because despite a whole range of determinisms, there is no subject which can solely and perfectly contain the potential for revolt. The simultaneous attempt at justice must also fail, because the integration of each successive subject position into normative relations necessitates the construction of the next Other to be disciplined or destroyed.*"

And so we see a Daoist, yin and yang, kind of logic here, that "order" and "chaos" are parts of a greater whole, forces working together which constitute that whole in, by and through their interaction. Society, in this way of thinking, is an order which needs chaos in order to reproduce its order which then needs more chaos to... etc. The project Baedan

describe in *Journal of Queer Nihilism* is one where they take on the part of the death drive (or "the persistent negativity of the death drive") consciously and as a matter of commitment. In this way they aim not to become the next project to be assimilated by the order of society – in which case their role would only be passed on to the next "Other". But this has consequences – and both Edelman and Baedan can draw them. One is that "queer" is not "an oppositional political identity" but rather "opposition to politics as the governing fantasy of identities". Another is that the "real strategic value" of queerness "lies in its resistance to (a) symbolic reality that only ever invests in us as subjects insofar as we invest ourselves in it" with all the fictions of governing, for example, that that also involves. This, according to Baedan, amounts to "a total refusal of attempts at the symbolic integration of our sexuality into governing and market structures" and "freedom that ultimately resides in nothing more than the capacity to advance into emptiness". This is a "non-identitarian, unrepresentable, unintelligible queer revolt" and is "purely negative". It is kin to an insurrectionary anarchy which aims at nothing positive but only wants to destroy that which incarcerates both it and everything else. Consequently:

"*If we hope to interrupt the ceaseless forward motion of capital and its state, we cannot rely on failed methods. Identity politics, platforms, formal organizations, subcultures, activist campaigns (each being either queer or anarchist) will always arrive at the dead ends of identity and representation. We must flee from these positivities, these models, to instead experiment with the undying negativity of the death drive... an insurrectionary process can only be an explosion of negativity against everything that dominates and exploits us, but also against everything that produces us as we are.*"

Now queerness has an in-built resistance to a society built on Edelman's "reproductive futurity" and centred on the symbolic Child. This is that it does not privilege heteronormativity or the heteronormative family unit. But it is also more than this – and in the recitation of Baedan should be:

"*Queerness, beyond being the negation of the heteronormative family matrix, must also be practiced as a willful refusal of the political imperative to reproduce class society. In a world where all social relations are enchanted by our obligation to the Child as the future of the social order, we must break those communal relations and break the stranglehold of politics over our daily lives. Queerness must be an outside to politics, an antagonism against the political, or it isn't queer at all.*"

This is to say that queers are those NOT fighting for the children. This is not in the sense that they are child haters or members of a suicide cult that is trying to end the human species by stopping all children being born. It is in the sense that they do not ascribe to the logic of "The Child" that civilisation does (where "The Child" is but a symbol anyway as already explained). In fact, they sound remarkably like people who have read Stirner's *The Unique and Its Property* in that they are not fighting for causes or symbols at all. Queers, in the interpretation of Baedan, do not have somewhere special to get to, some Utopia to achieve. Rather:

"*We flee from all political roles which we're called upon to symbolize, whether those constructed by the media or by those self-appointed leaders of struggles. Unlike most other self-declared revolutionaries, we are not fighting for a utopian future (communist, anarchist, cybernetic). We are not looking for victories that will be enjoyed by symbolic children in a future society. We are not fighting for an abstract ideal. We are not creating a*

world, and we are not motivated by anything outside of ourselves. Our anti-political practice, our attempts at insurrection, emerge purely from the context of an awareness of our daily lives. If we speak of social war, it is because we're experimenting with types of relationships and combat in order to attack the social order."

This is because:

"*Halting the ceaseless pursuit of a better world for the Child, our project centers itself on immediate fulfilment, joy, conflict, vengeance, conspiracy and pleasure. Rather than politics, we engage in social war. Without demands, we expropriate what we desire. Instead of representation, we rely on autonomous self-organization. We do not protest, we attack. As with our queerness, our anti-politics strives to escape political identification or ideological attachment to this or that political subjectivity.*"

This is both queer according to Queer Theory but also egoistic according to Max Stirner – and where both can be theorised to come from and lead to... nothing (much, in fact, like the wild which it also seems to be related to, and even to mimic, in a political imaginary). Both can be imagined to exist in an ever present outside time that is not focused on any future but neither is it tied to any particular past either. (Both would be mere illusions or conjurings in any case.) One could even argue such a conception of queer is "against the future itself" (at least certainly in its civilisational guise): "queer anti-futurity". This is because such a future, in its ideological construction and material self-maintenance, uses the queer (as it also uses the queers) as fodder for its ongoing continuance. It is that (amongst other generated enemies) which much be continually consumed in order to keep itself going. This, according to Edelman as Baedan highlights for their own argument, is exactly because of civilised society's fixation on "The Child", a symbol which

everything about the queer fails to privilege in equal measure. In fact, given that queer sex is very often non-reproductive, we can say that the queer is not even necessarily anything to do with children at all. Consequently, there are those who would use this against them politically:

"*The Child... marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity: an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism. And so, as the radical right maintains, the battle against queers is a life-and-death struggle for the future of a Child whose ruin is pursued by queers. Indeed, as the Army of God made clear in the bomb-making guide it produces for the assistance of its militantly 'pro-life' members, its purpose was wholly congruent with the logic of reproductive futurism: to 'disrupt and ultimately destroy Satan's power to kill our children, God's children.'"*

The fact that such civilisation is configured ideologically and symbolically around The Child is not coincidence, of course. Children, not least according to the ethos of such civilisation, are those who (mostly!) both do what they are told and who become who they are told they are (i.e. they are more easily manipulable and obedient). Such a concept is also about race and nation as well. It is about reproducing more of ourselves as opposed to letting just anything come to pass as it does of its own activity or volition. I can give references to many books which speak of a naturally occurring wild diversity but "reproductive futurity" and the symbol of The Child are not about that. They are about, as Edelman puts it, "secur(ing) our existence through the fantasy that we survive in (the children)". And this is a violent ideology for what would such people not do to secure their now imagined racial heritage or their imaginary nation? As Baedan then extrapolate:

"*This fascism of the baby's face serves to reify difference and thus to secure the reproduction of the existent social order in the form of the future. No atrocity is out of the question if it is for the Child; no horrible project of industry should be precluded if it will serve to hasten the future of industrial civilization. Armies of men, imperial and revolutionary alike, have always lined up to the slaughter in the name of the Child.*"

Here Baedan switches to the work of Jacques Camatte which focuses on capitalism as a kind of domestication where capital itself colonises human beings, "constituting their very being and recreating human relations into communities of capital." In Camatte's theorising in his essay "Against Domestication" capital insidiously works its way into every human structure and relationship until the structures and relations are actually made from capital such that they would all fail without it. This includes past, present and future in such a way as they form a totality. Of this Baedan then comment:

"*This totality is our situation. History is only the record of centuries of defeat and the triumph of capital over the dead. The future is a horizon dominated by its representation as the sphere of expansion possibilities and new technologies. And around us are the innumerable institutions, technologies and processes that would use us as the submissive tools for this process of domination. This is what it means to describe capitalism as a totality. This is why we don't simply argue against a specific economic system, but against industrial society itself; not for a particular management of the means of production, but against them altogether.*"

The point here is the obvious one: if you are against this society then you are literally fighting against EVERYTHING. And possibly everyone too since certainly many, if not most, will have been assimilated by this totality and made utterly dependent upon it in

such a way as they are convinced they cannot afford for it to fail. Blind to any “outside” to the system they have always lived in, or to any alternative to it, they equate their life, all life, with the capitalist system. Capital, as Baedan agree, “forms the horizon of our lives” and so they can utilise Edelman’s phrase “no future” as a description of the capitalist futurescape with all its inevitable crises, debts, deceiving illusions, exploitations, etc. “No future” means this system has you by the short and curlies and it ain’t ever letting go and all you have to look forward to is that the whole thing might one day be destroyed because there is either this – eternally – or nothing at all. So it will go on presenting its illusions and telling you that you rely on it working – or else! – and it will keep you perpetually on the hook with no alternatives, delivering only constant repetition of the same, more alienation, more depression, more meaninglessness.

So what does this mean for the queer anti-politics? Baedan write:

“*If queerness is to be our weapon, we must fanatically avoid any tendency toward reproductive futurism that would dull our daggers. We must refuse the institutions of the future, whether high schools or police departments, that eternally immiserate our present. If we are to cease the skyward growth of the pile of queer bodies sacrificed at the feet of the future, we must silence the chorus of it-gets-betters and attack, here and now, at whatever is making it unbearable… we must situate ourselves within our present, and studiously explore the methods of sabotage, interruption, expropriation and destruction that refuse futurity’s domination.*”

This essentially means stopping the reproduction of more of the same and the endless futurity. It means not wanting to build a better version of now. (There is no better version of now! Now is now and only makes yet more now!) It means not wanting political

representation nor to build some kind of imaginary "positive politics". It means that "queer" does not name a positive project – nor even anything that can actually be named. It is not, for example (Edelman's example, actually), "Judith Butler and her project for radical inclusivity" which forgets that this society needs an "Other" and so you cannot "inclusivity" your way to a better future. For anyone who gets included only hands on the "enemy of society" banner to someone else in an endless dance:

"*The social order's necessary Other cannot be abolished through the reform-oriented integration of each successive other into the project of representative politics. Another Other must rise to fill the void. Society will locate another enemy subject to discipline and to destroy.*"

But now another insight, coming first from Edelman and followed by Baedan's extrapolation. This is that queerness's unrepresentability, and its being fundamentally opposed to being identifiable, is majorly what it is about. Its wild refusal of identity, its wild opposition to identity, inaugurates a struggle against "the Politics of Identity" *tout court*. This becomes "the refusal of intelligibility", the rejection of a society based upon subjects identified, tagged, rendered intelligible and, as such, suitable for control operations within a structure of intelligibility. Queer, in an outburst of wildness, confounds, refuses, the societal idea of knowledge and understanding. Queer refuses to produce the speech and the description, the linguistified conceptuality, by which things are ordered. It abhors the very idea of such linguistic representability and the endless (Foucault-identified) spewing of language about ourselves by which we can be marketed, surveilled and put in a box. The logic, which Jacques Camatte calls "a revolution of life itself" and about "another way of living", is, in Baedan's words, as follows:

"*We are captured by the state every time we make ourselves intelligible. Whether demand, political subject, or formal organization, each intelligible form can be recuperated, represented, or annihilated. Our project then must proceed in the recognition of the paradox that its being made truly intelligible—even by us, even to us—would be its defeat. We must seize the possibility of a life neither constrained by nor produced through the omnipresence of capital and state. It is precisely by the fact that words fail to describe it and programs fail to bring it about that we can know this life. As such, any imperative to put this ineffable project into words must be understood as a compromise of what must be an uncompromising project. There is no language which can make our intentions comprehensible to the social order. Any move toward such comprehensibility would be a betrayal of the specific antagonistic character of our project against that social order.*" (This is all very wild for the wild seeks no intelligibility either, cannot be captured by, or in, words either, offers no intentions either. It is simply direct action, an "uncompromising project".)

Camatte then makes an important point about this:

"*Underlying all this is a profoundly important phenomenon: all human life from the very beginning of its development within capitalist society, has undergone an impoverishment. More than this, capitalist society is death organized with all the appearances of life. Here it is not a question of death as the extinction of life, but death-in-life, death with all the substance and power of life. The human being is dead and is no more than a ritual of capital.*"

Queers' "ineffability" (as Edelman calls it) is a matter of life and death. That which is named can be killed, destroyed, incarcerated, controlled, expunged. That which cannot be

named at least preserves the anonymous opportunity for escape – or mischief. (Think *V for Vendetta*.) And so "In this project, we have nothing to gain by speaking the language of, or making demands to, the existent power structures." Our intelligibility before them is their means of our control according to this thinking even as the wild can be consumed as and when it becomes subject to human domestication. (In both cases it is a domestication.)

So if we refuse "positive politics" with its "reproductive futurity" and its "drive towards intelligibility" we need to ask about what, if anything, this conception of queerness seeks as a "purely negative project". Clearly, the answer could simply be "destruction" but in the writing of Baedan it isn't. The destruction and sabotage envisaged also includes the reality of "escape". (One does not knock down the prison walls merely to stay standing in the rubble.) However, Baedan are clear to articulate that this is not a matter of "progressive paths toward utopia" and that it must take place "outside the abstract symbolic world where politics and identity function". (This is to reiterate that now can only generate more now. The new, the different, the diverse, must spontaneously erupt out of nowhere and with neither teleological end or purpose in sight nor an identity that can be assigned.) So this sounds like something self-fulfilling, self-referential and self-determined, something that is self-actualising. Edelman talks, psychoanalytically, about "the material and affective facts of our existence which escape representation and signification". But what is that? It is jouissance once again. (Recall that jouissance is not easily translatable. It can mean "enjoyment". It can mean "pleasure". It can mean "orgasm". But one thing seems clear: where it comes from and where it goes nobody knows.) Jouissance, in fact, seems to be that remainder which can't be captured, put to use, or even adequately described – for it always escapes mere words. It is that which "cannot be captured in a textbook or situated neatly within narratives of progress for

queer people, or of rational political struggle for a better future." Jouissance can then be rage, it can be hatred, it can be bliss: an incommensurable. The following is some of what Baedan say descriptively about jouissance:

"*Jouissance is the driving élan of queer sex culture, and yet it is precisely that element of queer sex which still cannot be locked up in an industry, sold as a commodity or scheduled at some mass commercialized ritual. While each element of the sex industry attempts to resolve some fundamental lack and to integrate one's desires into a coherent subjective experience, jouissance is specifically that element of sexual desire which makes such a union impossible.*"

"*It is a desire for jouissance which sends us into the night seeking to overwhelm our bodily capacity, to disintegrate the corporeal limits of ourselves, to truly flee from what and who we are. It is specifically this remainder, which defines the unbridgeable chasm between the public sex culture of New York and San Francisco in the seventies (massive squatted sex warehouses, perpetual orgies, a culture of cruising which entirely dissolved the distinction between sex and the rest of life) and the so-called cruising of the cybernetic era (Grindr, craigslist, sparsely attended and overpriced parties at failing sex clubs). This distance might also be understood as what separates the anarchy of an orgy from the democratic ideology of purist polyamory. Jouissance is the unnameable desire that one hopelessly attempts to summarize before giving one's body to another: 'I want to be negated.'*"

"*Jouissance is that essence of queer criminality which cannot be reduced to any vulgar determinism. It is the joy found in the retribution of robbing some bourgeois john, the thrill of theft, the satisfaction of destruction. It is because we are addicted to the intertwining pleasure and pain which brings us again and again into the streets: seeking to riot or fight*

or fuck. It is specifically the pursuit of the unnameable jouissance which causes, without fail, to risk everything in sacrifice to some more grand chaos. This aufheben of the categories of pain and pleasure is also the overthrowing of our attachments and investments in political activism, stable identity, and reason. The negativity of jouissance is the same that drives us away from obligations to the economy, the family, the law, and, above all, the Future."

"*Any attempt to situate jouissance as a positive project can only ever be a step away from it. Circuit parties, pornography, social networking applications, political demonstrations, activist organizations, art: all of these strive to recuperate jouissance into some alternative structure, and yet must always fail because jouissance is inherently that which evades capture and ruptures the coherent narratives which justify such structures.*"

"*This jouissance is the resistance which is hidden by, and yet integral to, every social structure. Within the spectacles of the anti-austerity demonstrations and the plaza occupations lies the unnameable remainder which does not promise a better future. It is the unassimilable and ineffable tendency for people to self-sabotage any efforts at political organization. It is the darkness so feared by the right and so denied by the left. It is what the police must be called on to repress and the organizer to assimilate.*"

"*This insurrection cannot be understood as another event deferred to the future, but rather a possibility to seize life in spite of and against the social order. The promise of jouissance is not to deliver a more revolutionary futurity, but an irruption of irreducible negativity.*"

"*(Jouissance): irrational enjoyment; an enjoyment fixed in the present without a care for the future.*"

All of this commentary about queer nihilism so far covers but the first of three sections which comprise the opening extended essay in *Journal of Queer Nihilism*. The second of these three sections, which turns to address the work of Guy Hocquenghem, to whom Baedan find Lee Edelman deeply indebted, is headed "Queers Gone Wild" – and this cannot be insignificant in my book which is about wildness. With Hocquenghem, of course, and especially with his book *Homosexual Desire* (and latterly the follow up *Gay Liberation After May 68* which was not available in English translation when Baedan wrote *Journal of Queer Nihilism* but has been since 2022) we are going back over 50 years from the present day to a previous time. Here the homosexual is more openly "degenerate" and "can only be a degenerate" because they literally do not generate in the normal sexual course of events. This, in fact, is Lee Edelman's recitation of things which Baedan extrapolates further as the fear "that bodies might find ways of intercourse which do not produce the child and are not concerned with the reproduction of the social order through its tiny body." Hocquenghem, however, takes another view:

"*For Hocquenghem, homosexuality is not a coherent identity or community, but instead a social category created to capture all the polymorphous and queer desires which cannot fit neatly into the social form of the Family. Queerness comes to figure the catch-all fantasy for all the unnameable nightmares which haunt the capitalist social order. Hocquenghem describes a growing imperialism of society which functions to attribute a social status and definition to everything, even that which cannot be classified. And so the destructive and polymorphic desires which lurk at the core of social relations are captured into a specific identity rather than being a capacity which could seduce or enchant any body.*"

This is focused on in *Journal of Queer Nihilism* in the section "Uncivilized Desire" where, in Hocquenghem's recitation, "the homosexual image contains a complex knot of dread and

desire" and "it is impossible to appear anywhere as a self-confessed homosexual without upsetting families, causing children to be dragged out of the way and arousing mixed feelings of horror and desire." This last bit is important for Hocquenghem reasons that, in this case, homosexuality must be disclosing something about desire, something unique in the way that homosexuality discloses it, something some want to hide. Baedan widen this point, saying that:

"*Desire, not specifically homosexual, is the tendency within society which also figures its undoing. Desire is the polymorphous and perverse overflowing that refuses to be captured within Oedipal reproduction or locked up in identity. Queerness, in its association with desire, names the negativity which is the nightmare of the social order. Desire, then, cannot be reduced to sexual attraction or orientation. Desire is a chaotic field which escapes representation, and so the repressive field of normative desire can only refer to it by the figures of those whose sexual practices are outside its matrix of intelligibility. The danger and fear associated with queerness are in relation to this unthinkability.*"

So queer here appears as an outside to those for whom an outside is an unthinkable horror, a beyond the walls of civilised probity, somewhere perhaps only populated by perverse barbarians who are prey to desire in an uncontrolled form. One could then possibly envisage such desire as something rebellious or even something in open revolt (for it is in this imaginary certainly something that refuses control). From the perspective of heteronormative-capitalist incarceration, it is certainly something dangerous, something that leads into a seemingly uncontrollable and nihilistic void. The gay academic Jeffrey Weeks, in his introduction to the English translation of *Homosexual Desire*, connects this with "the activity of autonomous, spontaneous groupings, outside the social order" such as were not uncommon during the social unrest in Paris in May 1968 in which

Hocquenghem himself played an active part. Such groupings, according to Weeks, are the "only" ones that can achieve "revolution" because they manifest "unalienated forms of radical social action" which are not "complicit with capitalism". This, suggests Weeks, is why Hocquenghem reifies those who are excluded from society (such as the figure of the homosexual) and the marginal for these are those who are ripe to produce social transformation. (This thesis is not totally unlike that Alan Moore concocts at the heart of *V for Vendetta* where it is a lesbian's radical authenticity that radicalises V.)

Baedan themselves see in this interpretation close links to the insurrectionary anarchist (and their ad-hoc, spontaneous and affinity-based self-organisation) with which I am also familiar and about which I have written several times before. They write:

"*The intertwining of the desires of autonomous groups in the process of struggle is exactly what we understand to be an insurrectionary process. Not the massified expansion of a party, but rather the multiplication and diffusion of anal groupings. Only by avoiding the old-forms of 'revolutionary' or 'working class' organization can we side-step the traps which are laid out by recuperation. To orient ourselves around desire, and to pursue the 'blissful enjoyment of the present,' would mean to disavow the progressive ideologies of reform, inclusion, movement building, or incremental change.*"

Here "the homosexual" (with an "anal" fascination that is symbolic itself) becomes a symbolic figure for an imaginary (and wild, organic) sociality just as "The Child" did previously for reproductive futurity – but it is a dark and dangerous anti-society figure that inaugurates something insurrectionary beyond identifying. (Could it be "the wild"?) Consequently (according to Hocquenghem):

"*The homosexual does not seek a peaceful and harmonious adjustment to society, and his effusive inclination... leads him along a path of ceaseless struggle. In short, the homosexual has not developed into a partner of human society. Here, human society means of course the Freudian model, in which homosexuality can only find a place according to the sublimated Oedipal mode. On the other hand, the homosexual points the way to another possible form of relationship which we hardly dare call society.*"

Baedan note that this cannot mean every single queer. Clearly, there are a significant proportion of assimilationist queers or queers who have been assimilated and "just want to get along" with the prevailing dispensation. So, as Baedan make clear, "there isn't anything inherently radical or anti-social about homosexuality". I think this is true to say if, and perhaps only if, homosexuality is imagined as "a sexuality". (And for me, to be clear, it is not because desire doesn't come in pre-configured forms but is a wild, unidentifiable energy, a life force.) For, reduced to a mere orientation, there is no reason why, in the rest of life, one should not be an assimilated figure, wrapped up in capitalist values and relations, a hostage to reproductive futurity. We have already seen how capitalism attempts to draw everything to itself in order to exploit it, forming entire societies in order to better control this exploitation. A "sexuality" is not the least of these things and "queer capitalism" is a real thing. Baedan, however, want to draw a connection between a "tendency" within queerness and the death drive's "desire for disorder hidden in the social order itself" or to emphasise "the anti-social relationships which draw their potential from queerness... as the potential for an autonomous movement against society." So, as Hocquenghem then notes in *Homosexual Desire*:

"*The appearance of autonomous movements, movements which reject the law of the signifier all the more because they create a law for themselves, has completely upset the*

political world. The confusion is total, since the links between these desiring situations do not occur according to the logical model of the signifier-signified but prefer to follow the logic of the event. It is therefore no use trying to work out the relationships between these movements in rational or strategic terms. It is incomprehensible that the gay movement should be closely connected with the ecological movement. Nevertheless, it is so. In terms of desire, the motor car and the family heterosexuality are one and the same enemy, however impossible it may be to express this in political logic." (Historical note: it was amongst lesbian co-travellers of Hocquenghem in France that the term "ecofeminism" first appeared.)

Commenting on this Baedan say:

"*Hocquenghem perfectly expresses the way in which desire is bound to a refusal of the future, a purely negative critique, and an anti-political praxis. Politics cannot rationally express why the motor car and the family are the same enemy of queerness. And yet, for us, it is abundantly obvious why these, and literally every other apparatus of modern society, must be annihilated. Lacking the means to express this destructive desire through politics, only an anti-politics can elaborate a process by which queer desire can be materialized against the physical arrangement of the social order. The car, the family, the school, the prison, the boutique, the surveillance infrastructure: each an expression of a civilization in the face of which our most potent desire is its annihilation. For him, the undoing of civilization must be linked to a movement based in the uncontrollability of desire.*"

The thing to get here is something said in "The Screwball Asses" (see below) and which so struck me that I placed it as one of the quotes at the head of this whole book:

"*...civilization is the trap into which desire keeps falling...*"

The figure of the homosexual seems a nihilistic, uncivilised figure because in the symbol of the gay with its anal fixation that leads only to a black hole (brown hole?) to nowhere is the symbol of the end of civilisation. The homosexual is the end of reproduction and so the end of futurity. No more "Oedipal succession of generations" as French psychoanalytic theorists (and those others inspired by them) might have it. No anything but desire uncontrolled that leads us all to the eventual death of the species. So queer is "uncivilised desire". But more than that, according to "The Screwball Asses", "it is not the signifier of what might become a new form of social organisation, a new stage in civilised humanity". It is this aspect which shows up civilisation as the "trap" of desire for, says "The Screwball Asses", homosexual desire is neither on the side of life or death – it is, as I would now have it, ON THE SIDE OF THE WILD (which encompasses both life and death in a larger reality). And being on the side of the wild "it is the killer of civilised egos" (in the words of "The Screwball Asses").

Baedan can now link this insight together with what has come before... and, interestingly for my project, WITH THE WILD AS WELL:

"*(Here) is the vital link between the fantasy of futurity, the construction of the coherent self, and their intersection in reproductive futurism. To oppose reproductive futurism, and the reproduction of the social order through the endless succession of generations, is to signify the end of civilization as well as the subjects which comprise it. This destruction is to be found in the degeneration and disintegration of social structures into the queer formations which exist in constant pursuit of jouissance and without a care for the future. The proliferation of these queer autonomous groups does not prefigure a better world;*

these groupings of desire can only confront civilization as a negative, antipolitical, wild force... (Yet) Our queer position against civilization is not based on some notion of naturalness, eternally linked as we are to signifying the outside of any idealized natural order. Queers must always figure those types of unregenerative, non-productive beings which have no place in a natural order. Neither is our struggle to prove the legitimacy of, or attempt to naturalize, queerness. Nature itself is a disciplinary category of civilization used to define and classify wild life. Instead, as (trans academic and activist Susan) Stryker insists, we'll ally ourselves with the 'chaos and darkness' from which nature spills forth. This chaos and darkness, being the same unintelligible force which Hocquenghem calls homosexual desire, which Edelman calls the death drive. We locate ourselves in the spilling forth of the same chaos which promises civilization's undoing."

There is a further, linguistic aspect to all this, however, and it is something I have been thinking of throughout my focus on "the wild" more generally in this book. Actually, it was the process of writing this book which brought it up for me so I am glad to find it has occurred, tangentially, to others too. The issue is that of the tyranny of language perhaps otherwise put as the consequences of our being creatures which linguistify everything (where "the wild" does not for, as a system of relations, the wild does not speak at all and clearly gets on adequately without wishing, or needing, to do so – at least in terms we can recognise). I am one of those post-Nietzscheans who regards language as a human means or mode of existence, a way of making human existence habitable and profitable for humans. I am not one of those who thinks language "gets reality right", is based on something so arrogant as "knowledge" or involves something as arrogant as "understanding" of the universe in naively positivist and philosophically realist ways. I think that "correspondence" and "representation" are not functions of language. Much like the thinking of Richard Rorty, I think that we get reality right enough (in a practical

sense) in order to be able to stay alive for more than a moment but that, beyond that, there is not much to say. Language, which is a tool, is simply part of the human apparatus for maintaining an existence. It is not a characteristic which imbues us with god-like insight. Or, rather, whether it is that or not we have no ability to ultimately determine.

Now civilisation is very much based on language (which might actually be an alienating factor in terms of our connection to "wildness", but I digress) – and readers would do well to remember this for it is a vital detail. We have in fact already seen this point in the previous criticism of "intelligibility" which Baedan introduced from the work of Lee Edelman in *No Future*. Now they reveal (incorrectly, for they follow the ascription of the text "The Screwball Asses" from the 1973 French-banned edition of the Felix Guattari edited journal *Recherches*, titled *Three Billion Perverts: Great Encyclopedia of Homo-Sexualities*, to Hocquenghem which history has now proved a false ascription. This text was actually written by one Christian Maurel even if Hocquenghem was himself closely involved in the compiling of *Three Billion Perverts* in general) that Hocquenghem actually subsumes this critique (as well as pre-dating it) under a "deeper criticism of language in general". Of course, inasmuch as Baedan now take inspiration from what is written in "The Screwball Asses", it is Maurel they should latterly be crediting and not Hocquenghem. For my purposes, of course, it only matters what the actual argument is.

In the opening exchanges of "The Screwball Asses" the author talks about some gay men whom he describes as "talking to escape desire". The phrase stands out to me as I read it (not least because it seems of importance in relation to someone of my acquaintance) and I riddle with it in my mind, working on its connotations. Language as an obfuscation? Language as a barrier or interruption? Language as (deliberate or illusory?) obstacle? Language as imagined (yet inappropriate) substitute? But to talk about the thing is not to

do, or to be, the thing. It is a completely different activity with other purposes. In this connection the author of “The Screwball Asses” has discussed gay men who met to discuss Hocquenghem’s book *Homosexual Desire*, as well as its explicit subject, homosexual desire itself but, when the matter became personal and too close to home, became coy and obfuscatory, the actual (as opposed to the discursive) homosexual desire in the room suddenly losing its voice and incapable of erection (actual or metaphorical). Maurel refers here to their “repression of speech and self-censorship” as if it is to betray the desire they set out to explore. Desire, of whatever material kind, has then here been “prohibited” and only talk of an abstract discursive desire may actually take place.

What this reveals, not least in the interpretation of Baedan, is a division between language and the body. If we are thinking through desire, through queerness, through jouissance, then it figures that the body becomes an important, indeed a central, matter in this – for it is the body, and only the body, that feels. Baedan say that for Hocquenghem (although they may mean Maurel inasmuch as their interpretation seems to rely on “The Screwball Asses” to some extent) language can become a trap of desire and, moreover, that which, in any attempt to represent (either desire or anything else) must always fail. Language as representation is an illusion of language. Yet if, as I have suggested after more illustrious others, language is but a tool, then it must be being deployed in the service of something and the most obvious candidate is, in fact, the body. But since language relies on illusions, deceptions and fictions so much this should not necessarily be thought of as straightforward. Language often conjures things and relies on imagination and is equally often not doing what you can be led to believe it is. For example, the claim is made here that “sex is unspeakable”. You can’t replicate the feelings of the body, its desires, its ecstasies, its nuances, in words. But that does not mean words

cannot be used sexually, seductively, in a substitutional way. But its not the same thing even if one is in service of the other.

Yet this does not have to be so and, as forewarned, language can become oppositional to the body in its usage, a trap for its desires, a mechanism of incarceration. Maurel in “The Screwball Asses” talks about what amounts to a tyranny of language when the desire is actually “to speak with the body rather than with words, or to live corporeality rather than speak of sexuality”. So under a tyranny of words do we become in an age of “enlightenment” dominated by “reason” that words and language come to have a power that our bodies, by themselves, struggle to overcome or to break free of, being enchanted by their literal spell (at least, if you follow the philosophies of Alan Moore for whom language is literally the stuff of magic conjuring realities the body must inhabit). But this then sets up a “contradiction” between body and language in the interpretation of Baedan – or at least between an habitual mode of human expression, language, and a body which has more than one means of expression and desires which do not consult language (and don’t require to speak in or through language) before becoming actual or authentic.

This can result, in the persuasive interpretation of some, in what Foucault called “the disciplining of the body” in and through language. (This is exampled in many of his books which are “histories of thought” and, in one sense, are about how language has been summoned and deployed in order to control and contain bodies – including, most importantly, their desire.) The Italian-American Marxist-Feminist scholar Silvia Federici also follows similar thinking in her work on the capitalist “domestication of human beings” in which human bodies, vessels of their own desires, are instead turned into “labor-power” or “work-machines” which become commodified and service a linguistically

constructed purpose (capitalism) rather than simple desire. In Federici's interpretation it is the body which becomes the first (and most necessary) machine of industrial capitalism (before even the steam engine or the clock) in what becomes a battle between Enlightenment Reason (with its ally Language) and The Body (with its ally Desire). Of this, Baedan can comment:

"*Here we see the tyranny of the Child traced back through time and embedded in language itself. The assault upon the body by Reason and Language has always been to eliminate all non-productive desires and capacities. Reproductive futurism then becomes the framework through which certain forms of social engagement are militarily enforced while others are eradicated. This militaristic and scientific approach to disciplining the body functions through the body's capture within language. Federici argues that 'in mechanical philosophy we perceive a new bourgeois spirit that calculates, classifies, makes distinctions, and degrades the body only in order to rationalize its faculties, aiming not just at intensifying its subjection but at maximizing its social utility.' Here the linguistic and discursive institutions of Identity and Sexuality function alongside all other racializing and gendering apparatuses to encode alienated bodies with particular values and functions—values and functions which serve to reproduce society in every body and every instant.*"

Bodies and their desires can then be controlled, corralled, by language and its reasons. In an Age of Reason (itself a project of the deployment of language) this can even be made to seem entirely logical and necessary. The body, with its desires, lusts, emotions, feelings, can be made to seem illegitimate, irrelevant before such a logical and sensible conjuring and enchanting power. Here we come to see that capitalism, and its dictates upon the body and its desire, are exactly such a conjuring and enchantment for a very particular purpose for which the body and its desire have not been consulted. Rather,

they are the things which have had to be disciplined and shaped in, by and through language in order to take on the form capitalism requires. Here separating the body from its capacity for uncommodifable jouissance has been of the utmost importance for nothing could be more destructive of capitalism's machine mentality. (Can you imagine people just stopping work for a bit because they feel like doing something else?) Machines simply perform the task for which they have been made or formed over and over again as determined. But a body with desire with a capacity for jouissance is ill-disciplined, willful, spontaneous, chaotic, WILD! – in other words, completely unsuited to the capitalist task and discipline. Consequently, it must be made so suited. So in the words of Federici in her book *Caliban and the Witch*:

"*the conflict is now staged within the person who is reconstructed as a battlefield, where opposite elements clash for domination. On the one side, there are the forces of Reason: parsimony, prudence, sense of responsibility, self-control. On the other, the low instincts of the Body: lewdness, idleness, systematic dissipation of one's vital energies. The battle is fought on many fronts because Reason must be vigilant against the attacks of the carnal self, and prevent 'the wisdom of the flesh' from corrupting the powers of the mind…*

... This conflict between Reason and the Body, described by the philosophers as a riotous confrontation between the better and the lower sorts... the battle which 17th century discourse on the person imagines unfolding in the microcosm of the individual has arguably a foundation in the reality of the time. It is an aspect of that broader process of social reformation, whereby, in the age of reason, the rising bourgeoisie attempted to remold the subordinate classes in conformity with the needs of the developing capitalist economy...

That battle against the body that has become its historic mark... The reform of the body is at the core of the bourgeois ethic because capitalism makes acquisition 'the ultimate purpose of life,' instead of treating it as a means for the satisfaction of our needs, thus it requires that we forfeit all spontaneous enjoyment of life...

... The body, emptied of its occult forces, could be caught in a system of subjection, whereby its behavior could be calculated, organized, technically thought and invested of power relations... The development of the body into a work-machine, [was] one of the main tasks of primitive accumulation.... Like the land, the body had to be cultivated and first of all broken up, so that it could relinquish its hidden treasures. For while the body is the condition of the existence of labor-power, it is also its limit, as the main element of resistance to its expenditure. It was not sufficient, then, to decide that in itself the body had no value. The body had to die so that labor-power could live...

... By transforming labor into a commodity, capitalism causes workers to submit their activity to an external order over which they have no control and with which they cannot identify. Thus, labor process becomes a ground of self estrangement... This too leads to a sense of dissociation from the body, which becomes reified, reduced to an object with which the person ceases to be immediately identified...

... From a capitalist viewpoint... here the future can be anticipated only insofar as the regularity and immutability of the system is assumed; that is, only insofar as it is assumed that the future will be like the past, and no major change, no revolution, will upset the coordinates of individual decision-making... The fixation of the body in space and time, that is, the individual's spatio-temporal identification, is an essential condition for the regularity of the work-process...

... Also from the point of view of the abstraction process that the individual underwent in the transition to capitalism, we can see that the development of the human machine was the main technological leap, the main step in the development of the productive forces that took place in the period of primitive accumulation. We can see, in other words, that the human body and not the steam engine, and not even the clock, was the first machine developed by capitalism."

What Federici describes here in fragments from her work is the Enlightenment's capitalist process of human domestication, a domesticating process which alienates the human being from their desire – because it has to in order that the dictates and valorizations of that process may overcome the human body. Of this Baedan then comment:

"*Starting from a critique of civilization, we can understand this self-domination as a result of our domestication into subjects. Locating language and symbolic thought as engines of this domestication then as a consequence, our very capacity to think has been colonized from birth onward through this process. As such, we must turn to those forms of struggle which are not justified by Reason. We must turn to that ineffable jouissance as a tool in combat against domestication... If Federici is correct, if our very bodies have been destroyed and re-made into work-machines, and if these machines are the original machines which constitute the capitalist social order, then we must take our very bodies as machines to be sabotaged; our very corporeality, as Hocquenghem argues, must be the field of combat.*"

The struggle is then, first and most importantly, with ourselves in order to decolonise our mind-bodies, to reconnect with desire, a power beyond Reason, by means of an ineffable jouissance in order to strike against "the domestication intrinsic to civilization". Baedan describe this domestication as:

"*the process of the victory of our fathers over our lives; the ways in which the social order laid down by the dead continues to haunt the living. It is the residue of accumulated memories, culture and relationships which have been transmitted to us through the linear progression of time through the fantasy of the Child.*"

The upshot here is that WE ARE COLONISED FROM BIRTH, formed into beings contrary to our wild desires, told we are things we are not and not told we could be whatever our desire desires. Rather than being free to grow wild, we are cultivated, propagated, developed for an express "reasonable", "logical", capitalist purpose. So then as Jacques Camatte notes from an essay ("The Wandering of Humanity") quoted by Baedan, "It is a totality that has to be destroyed", a material-ideological totality. But, more importantly:

"*THE PROBLEM IS TO CREATE OTHER LIVES.*"

Of course, these will be lives of the body, lives of desire, lives of jouissance, nihilistic lives of no future beyond categorisation or capture, non-commodifiable lives. Decolonised lives. Lives that have refused queer as a "sexuality" because they have recognised queer as a welcoming and necessary anti-political nihilism, a liberatory nihilism. As Baedan then comment, "It is for this reason that we concern ourselves with the queer desire to locate subjectivity's sutures and tear them out." Or we can once more recall Hocquenghem's cri de coeur in "To Destroy Sexuality":

"*We are not concerned with simply breaking down [the] official sexuality as one would break down the condition of one's imprisonment within any structure; we want to destroy it, to get rid of it, because in the final analysis it functions as an infinitely repeating*

castration machine designed to reproduce everywhere and in everyone the unquestioning obedience of a slave..."

What we want, in fact, is to imagine "queerness as wildness" with total authenticity, an authenticity coming from the body and its desires. And this wildness is "a madness attacking the civilized order". Perhaps even a Dionysian madness. All hail the mad god. And so, as Baedan say:

"*If we can determine anything from our project of queer negativity, it is that capitalism has an unlimited capacity to tolerate and recuperate any alternative politics or artistic expression we could imagine. It is not a political negativity that we must locate in our queerness, but rather a vicious anti-politics which opposes any utopian dreams of a better future residing on the far side of a lifetime of sacrifice. Our queer negativity has nothing to do with art, but it has a great deal to do with urban insurrection, piracy, slave revolt: all those bodily struggles that refuse the future and pursue the irrationality of jouissance, enjoyment, rage, chaos. Ours is not the struggle for an alternative, because there is no a hopeless, to tear our lives away from that expanding horizon and to erupt with wild enjoyment now. Anything less is our continued domestication to the rule of civilization.*"

From Queer Nihilism to Queer Anti-Politics

So it comes down to what? This is the bit where I am expected to tell you what to do. But you don't really expect me to, do you? Have you not read a fucking thing I've said? What I can do, however, is discuss things other people have said, queer bastards, and others, who "get it" and give voice to their ideas or things they have done. (What you do, of course,

will always remain up to you as your sole responsibility. Only you can decolonise yourself. Only you should chart your course. It is your responsibility.)

I begin with *Three Billion Perverts: Great Encyclopedia of Homosexualities*, the 12th edition of the French journal *Recherches* founded in 1965 by Felix Guattari. This particular edition (which, in the reproduction I got hold of, contained more drawings of cartoon penises than anything else I have ever read) was published in March 1973 and caused a scandal since the French government (and later the French courts) regarded it with moral outrage, in its own voice, it wantonly and blatantly announced homosexuality in French society – as well as delineating its consequences for society. The website Glassbead, which discusses, translates and publishes some of the issue in English amongst its pages, says of it that:

"*it became a milestone in the history of homosexual struggles. Recently reprinted, this publication is at once an historical document and an element of reflection for contemporary struggles for emancipation, shedding light on what could be a homosexual affirmation conceived as a radical break with the normative structures running through the social space.*

Combining testimonies, original texts, and interviews; articulating social criticism, literature, philosophy, and psychoanalysis; across spaces as diverse as cafés, political meetings, prisons, asylums, parks, and urinals; and bringing together contributions from such figures as Gilles Deleuze, Fanny Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Jean Genet, Felix Guattari, Daniel Guérin, Guy Hocquenghem, Jean-Jacques Lebel, the actor Marie-France, Vera Memmi, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Jozy Thibaut, 'Trois milliards de pervers' takes the form of a

collective of homosexuals reflecting on the come-on, masturbation, transvestites, scouting, and militant movements, in order to call into question all forms of desiring-production."

Mention of "scouting" is pertinent for this is a section of the journal (and, in fact, the only section) NOT republished when the issue was republished in the 21st century. Rather, it was self-censored in advance by the then publishers. Apparently what has been censored is the boyish sexuality of two scouts exploring their embodied feelings and, apparently, the idea that boys might have sexuality and that it might be depicted honestly is beyond the pail even in the 21st century. Or maybe it was that this section was called "Pedophilia", a word, indeed THE word, most determined to outrage morality police in today's authoritarian world where even ideas may not be discussed and no one come to harm as a result of their discussion. But I must get on with my story and say what *Three Billion Perverts* was actually about. Here we may note that, in the issue itself, Felix Guattari, the director of the issue, has an introductory piece in which he basically states that the issue seeks to put in question the methods of social science which, "under a pretext of objectivity", presume to describe gay experience and gay reality. Guattari will not have this and he describes three specific problems with such research (the pretend objectivity of "social surveys", "psychoanalytic prejudices", and a failure to let the militant homosexual speak for themselves). Indeed, the whole issue appears to be created in order to exactly let a raw and militant homosexuality speak for itself in and through those who have collaborated in its production. And this may be for a higher aim when Guattari says in his introduction that:

"*the gay... is not of himself a revolutionary - the revolutionary of modem times! We are simply saying that, among others, he could be, could become, a site for an important*

libidinal disruption in society - a point of emergence for revolutionary, desiring-energy from which classical militantism remains cut off."

Talk of "libidinal disruption" and "revolutionary, desiring-energy" sets us on a (Fourierist) trajectory and Guattari contextualises it further when he is prosecuted for publishing the issue. In "A Letter to the Court", the second part of "Three Billion Perverts on the Stand", a retrospective composite document compiled three years later, he says:

"*There was (in France) no conjunction of marginal homosexual movements with political movements: the problems of homosexuality were immediately posed as political questions. This spontaneist Maoist movement, formed around the journal Tout - the product of May '68 - refused not only to accept that homosexuality was an illness or a perversion, but advanced the view that it concerned all normal sexual life. Similarly, the women's liberation movement, the MLF [Mouvement de liberation des femmes], argued that feminine homosexuality was not only a form of struggle against male chauvinism, but also a radical questioning of all dominant forms of sexuality.*

Homosexuality would be, thus, not only an element in the life of each and everyone, but involved in any number of social phenomena, such as hierarchy, bureaucracy, etc. The question has thus been shifted: homosexual men and women refuse the status of an oppressed minority, and intend to lead a political offensive against the enslavement of all forms of sexuality to a system of reproduction, and to the values of bureaucratic, capitalist and socialist societies. This is, in fact, more about transsexuality than homosexuality: at issue is the definition of what sexuality would be in a society freed from capitalist exploitation and the alienation it engenders on all levels of social organization. From this

perspective the struggle for the liberty of homosexuality becomes an integral part of the struggle for social liberation.

The ideas arising from this line of thought were explored in the issue of Recherches for which I have been charged - as the director of the publication for 'affronting public decency'. In fact, the problems raised by this issue of Recherches are fundamentally, and only, political. The charge of pornography is merely a pretext, all too easily invoked in this particular domain; the main thing is suppression for the sake of 'an example'...

We wanted, therefore, to give direct voice to homosexuals. And the result? We are reproached for our impropriety. But of what nature is this impropriety, if it is not political? In fact, what is said in this issue of Recherches, and in the manner in which it is said, is clearly less than what can be found not only in publications for sex-shops - our goal was hardly to compete! - but also in scientific publications. The originality of the issue – that which shocks, and for which we are charged - lies in that for perhaps the first time, homosexuals and non-homosexuals speak of these problems for themselves and in an entirely free manner."

What Guattari gets at here is the notion that redefining sexuality (which must include gender and gender expression in a gender-sexuality matrix or combination) redefines the whole field of social relations and so both society and the individual themselves – and all that relies on them! Such questioning puts everything in question, each and every social relation and institution. And so of course the reaction to *Three Billion Perverts* is political because it cannot be anything else. The content of the journal (and, not least, that in it people speak for themselves baldly and with some vulgarity) is putting the politics of society in question and even finding it entirely arbitrary, false, unnecessary, damaging,

prejudiced, partisan, etc. Amongst his “notes for the trial” (the third and final part of “Three Billion Perverts on the Stand”) Guattari can then say that:

“*We think that the expression of desire is synonymous with disorder and irrationality. But the neurotic order that forces desire to conform to dominant models perhaps constitutes the real disorder, the real irrationality. It is repression that makes sexuality shameful and sometimes aggressive. Desire that can open itself up to the world ceases to be destructive and can even become creative. This trial is political. It makes a cause of a new approach to daily life, to desire, and the new forms of expression that have irrupted since 1968. Will we finally allow people to express themselves without having recourse to ‘representatives’? Will we allow them to produce their own journals, their own literature, theatre, cinema, etc.?*”

Guattari concludes this by describing those who created *Three Billion Perverts* as those speaking for themselves and as those speaking to “another order that seeks to build another world”. And this is precisely the political issue in a nutshell: YOU ARE NOT ALLOWED TO IMAGINE, MUCH LESS CREATE, ANOTHER WORLD! What *Three Billion Perverts* crudely examples is that when people focus on their bodies, their desire, their libido, a vast well of creative (and destructive) energy is tapped – one that might easily change the world. No wonder, of all subjects, that it is then the one most obsessively policed. We can see in this idea that queer sex questions all sexuality and so all human relations (and social and political society *tout court*) as well as the birth of queer as theory and queer as anti-politics. The critically militant gays and lesbians of 1970s France were fundamental to this development and in denaturalising heteronormative and patriarchal understandings of society based on fixed gender-sexual roles and relations which become both just a dominating story as well as a story of domination. Such work, metastasising through and across societies then comes to find other expressions. Here are some.

First we take note of the 1990 essay “Queers Read This” – also sometimes known as “I Hate Straights”. This was an anonymously written essay about queer, in opposition to the notion that queer is, or could be, a biological identity (essentialism), originally circulated by members of the Anonymous Queers collective as a broadsheet at the June 1990 New York Gay Pride Parade, and it is generally understood as some sort of manifesto. It is written in street vernacular and addresses everyday people. It regards queer as an “out and proud” activism and so can be seen as tapping into that libidinous well of which the *Three Billion Perverts* also tapped. What follows are some quotes from the essay:

“*AN ARMY OF LOVERS CANNOT LOSE*

Being queer is not about a right to privacy; it is about the freedom to be public, to just be who we are. It means everyday fighting oppression; homophobia, racism, misogyny, the bigotry of religious hypocrites and our own self-hatred. (We have been carefully taught to hate ourselves.) And now of course it means fighting a virus as well, and all those homo-haters who are using AIDS to wipe us off the face of the earth. Being queer means leading a different sort of life. It's not about the mainstream, profit-margins, patriotism, patriarchy or being assimilated. It's not about executive directors, privilege and elitism. It's about being on the margins, defining ourselves; it's about gender-fuck and secrets, what's beneath the belt and deep inside the heart; it's about the night. Being queer is ‘grass roots’ because we know that everyone of us, every body, every cunt, every heart and ass and dick is a world of pleasure waiting to be explored. Everyone of us is a world of infinite possibility. We are an army because we have to be. We are an army because we are so powerful. (We have so much to fight for; we are the most precious of endangered species.) And we are an army of lovers because it is we who know what love is. Desire and lust, too. We invented them. We come out of the closet, face the rejection of society, face firing squads, just to love each other! Every time we fuck, we win. We must fight for ourselves (no one else is going to do it)

and if in that process we bring greater freedom to the world at large then great. (We've given so much to that world: democracy, all the arts, the concepts of love, philosophy and the soul, to name just a few gifts from our ancient Greek Dykes, Fags.) Let's make every space a Lesbian and Gay space. Every street a part of our sexual geography. A city of yearning and then total satisfaction. A city and a country where we can be safe and free and more. We must look at our lives and see what's best in them, see what is queer and what is straight and let that straight chaff fall away! Remember there is so, so little time. And I want to be a lover of each and every one of you. Next year, we march naked...

You Can Learn More From Wearing A Dress For A Day... Than From Wearing A Suit For The Rest Of Your Life...

WHERE ARE YOU SISTERS?

Invisibility Is Our Responsibility

I wear my pink triangle everywhere. I do not lower my voice in public when talking about lesbian love or sex. I always tell people I'm a lesbian. I don't wait to be asked about my boyfriend.' I don't say it's 'no one's business.' I don't do this for straight people. Most of them don't know what the pink triangle even means. Most of them couldn't care less that my girlfriend and I are totally in love or having a fight on the street. Most of them don't notice us no matter what we do. I do what I do to reach other lesbians. I do what I do because I don't want lesbians to assume I'm a straight girl. I am out all the time, everywhere, because I WANT TO REACH YOU. Maybe you'll notice me, maybe we'll start talking, maybe we'll exchange numbers, maybe we'll become friends. Maybe we won't say a word but our eyes will meet and I will imagine you naked, sweating, openmouthed, your back arched as I am fucking you. And we'll be happy to know we aren't the only ones in the world. We'll be happy because we found each other, without saying a word, maybe just for a moment. But

no. You won't wear a pink triangle on that linen lapel. You won't meet my eyes if I flirt with you on the street. You avoid me on the job because I'm 'too' out. You chastise me in bars because I'm 'too political.' You ignore me in public because I bring 'too much' attention to 'my' lesbianism. But then you want me to be your lover, you want me to be your friend, you want me to love you, support, you, fight for 'OUR' right to exist. WHERE ARE YOU?

You talk, talk, talk about invisibility and then retreat to your homes to nest with your lovers or carouse in a bar with pals and stumble home in a cab or sit silently and politely by while your family, your boss, your neighbors, your public servants distort and disfigure us, deride us and punish us. Then home again and you feel like screaming. Then you pad your anger with a relationship or a career or a party with other dykes like you and still you wonder why we can't find each other, why you feel lonely, angry, alienated.

GET UP, WAKE UP SISTERS!!

Your life is in your hands. When I risk it all to be out, I risk it for both of us. When I risk it all and it works (which it often does if you would try it), I benefit and so do you. When it doesn't work, I suffer and you do not. But girl you can't wait for other dykes to make the world safe for you. STOP waiting for a better more lesbian future! The revolution could be here if we started it. Where are you sisters? I'm trying to find you, I'm trying to find you. How come I only see you on Gay Pride Day? We're OUT, Where the fuck are YOU?...

reeuQ yhW
Ah, do we really have to use that word? It's trouble. Every gay person has his or her own take on it. For some it means strange and eccentric and kind of mysterious. That's okay, we like that. But some gay girls and boys don't. They think they're more normal than strange.

And for others ‘queer’ conjures up those awful memories of adolescent suffering. Queer. It's forcibly bittersweet and quaint at best --- weakening and painful at worst. Couldn't we just use ‘gay’ instead? It's a much brighter word and isn't it synonymous with ‘happy?’ When will you militants grow up and get over the novelty of being different?

Why Queer

Well, yes, ‘gay’ is great. It has its place. But when a lot of lesbians and gay men wake up in the morning we feel angry and disgusted, not gay. So we've chosen to call ourselves queer. Using ‘queer’ is a way of reminding us how we are perceived by the rest of the world. It's a way of telling ourselves we don't have to be witty and charming people who keep our lives discreet and marginalized in the straight world. We use queer as gay men loving lesbians and lesbians loving being queer. Queer, unlike GAY, doesn't mean MALE. And when spoken to other gays and lesbians it's a way of suggesting we close ranks, and forget (temporarily) our individual differences because we face a more insidious common enemy. Yeah, QUEER can be a rough word but it is also a sly and ironic weapon we can steal from the homophobe's hands and use against him.

NO SEX POLICE

For anyone to say that coming out is not part of the revolution is missing the point. Positive sexual images and what they manifest saves lives because they affirm those lives and make it possible for people to attempt to live as self-loving instead of self-loathing. As the famous ‘Black is beautiful’ slogan changed many lives, so does ‘Read my lips’ affirm queerness in the face of hatred and invisibility as displayed in a recent governmental study of suicides that states at least one third of all teen suicides are Queer kids. This is further exemplified by the rise in HIV transmission among those under 21. We are most hated as queers for our

sexualness, that is, our physical contact with the same sex. Our sexuality and sexual expression are what makes us most susceptible to physical violence. Our difference, our otherness, our uniqueness can either paralyze us or politicize us. Hopefully, the majority of us will not let it kill us."

Next I shall dip into the well of *Queer Ultraviolence* and the various documents, essays, communiques, manifestos, and other assorted texts anthologized under the banner of the American queer "Bash Back!" movement. I have chosen from this vast anthology, a singular text by an anonymous group calling themselves Gender Mutiny. The text itself is titled "Hell Hath No Fury: A Chronology of Genderfuck Insurrection":

"Hell hath no fury like a drag queen scorned. - Silvia Rivera

The chronology below requires little introduction; the actions of all these rioters speak for themselves. Suffice to say that this chronology is a small attempt to address a fallacy in popular conceptions of insurrection—that insurrection is 'macho,' masculine, or that it reinforces gender norms. It should also address another fallacy in the commonly understood chronology of queer and trans resistance—the one that says 'Stonewall was first.'

A note on language. Any terms we apply anachronistically will fail to reflect the ways these individuals and collectives identified. Moreover, we have first-hand accounts from none of these rioters, except some of the participants from Stonewall and Compton's. Since any language we choose for such a broad span of time, place, and culture will be historically inaccurate, we just say genderfuck insurrection. It has the nicest ring to our ears. Genderfuck is an active term; it speaks of a force that acts upon gender normality.

This is more interesting to us than other terms that are passive and speak of identity, which attempt to freeze and quarantine gender transgression into special individuals. Our tour begins in Greece, the cradle of democracy and the location of the most recent massive insurrection against the false hope of democracy...

390

In Thessalonica, Greece, Butheric, the commander of the militia, arrested a popular circus performer under a new law that punished 'male effeminacy.' The people of Thessalonica, who loved the performer, rose up in rebellion and killed Burtheric. In response to the insurrection, authorities rounded up and massacred three thousand people.

1250

In Southern France a small crowd of cross-dressed males pranced into the home of a wealthy landowner. They sang 'We take one and give back a hundred,' and ignored the protestations of the lady of the house as they looted the estate of every possession.

1450-51

These were the years of Cade's Rebellion in Kent & Essex, England. Led by the 'servants of the Queen of the Fairies,. the peasants broke into the Duke of Buckingham's land and took his bucks and does.

1530

During his campaign of conquest against communities of resistance in western portions of 'New Spain,' Spanish conquistador Nuno de Guzman wrote of a battle. The very last indigenous warrior taken prisoner after the battle was, in the conquistador's words, 'a man in the habit of a woman' who had 'fought most courageously.'

17th Century

Urban carnivals throughout Europe integrated cross-dressing and masks as key elements. The festivals were organized by societies of unmarried 'men' with trans personalities. They were called the Abbeys of Misrule, Abbots of Unreason, Mere Folle and her children, etc. During festival, they would 'hold court' with mock marriages, and issue coins to the crowds. They made fun of the government, critiqued the clergy, and protested war and the high cost of bread.

1629

In Essex, England, a grain riot was led by 'Captain' Alice, who was trans.

1630

In Dijon, France, Mere Folle and her Infanterie went beyond throwing carnivals and mocking elites. They led an uprising against royal tax officers. As a result, a furious royal edict abolished the Abbey of Misrule.

1631

Riots against enclosure in England were led by Lady Skimmington, at the head of a mob in drag.

1645

In Montpellier, France, a tax revolt was led by La Branlaire, a term used for masculine women.

1720

Untold numbers of trans pirates sailed across the open seas in the Golden Age of Piracy in the Caribbean. It was not altogether uncommon at the time for 'women' to 'pass as men' while sailing in the navy, on mercantile ships, and as pirates. The two most well-known trans pirates of the era are (Mary) Read and (Anne) Bonny. They sailed together with Captain John Rackham, and their stories are known from when they were put on trial for piracy. They were said to be the most fierce and courageous fighters in their crew. Like most pirates, they were faggots.

1725

Since 1707, the Societies for the Reformation of Manners carried out systematic attacks on London's queer underground. More than 20 'molly houses' were raided by police in London and many 'mollies' (males dressing as females) publicly dragged and hung for cross-dressing. But on one day in 1725, the police attempted a raid of a Covent Garden molly house, and the crowd of mollies, many in drag, fiercely and violently fought back.

1728-1749

'To cite but four examples, toll gates were demolished by bands of armed men dressed in women's clothing and wigs in Somerset in 1731 and 1749, in Gloucester in 1728 and in Herefordshire in 1735.'

1736

'[T]he Porteous Riots, which were sparked by a hated English officer and oppressive custom laws and expressed resistance to the union of Scotland and England, were carried out [in Edinburgh, Scotland] by men disguised as women and with a leader known as Madge Wildfire.'

1760s

This was the decade of the White Boy commons restoration movement in Ireland. The White Boys, a peasant guerrilla group who called themselves 'fairies' and did mischief at night, were a central feature of the rural class war. They destroyed enclosures, sent threatening letters to elites, reclaimed properties seized by landlords, and freed bound apprentices. They were finally put down by armed force. Their spirit inspired the formation of the Lady Rocks and Lady Clares in the 1820s and 1830s, and the later Ribbon Societies and Molly Maguires—all of whom cross-dressed, and were involved in Ireland's anti-enclosure and anti-colonial struggles.

1770s

In Beaujolais, France, 'male' peasants dressed as women attacked surveyors who were assessing their lands for a new landlord.

1812

One of the early Luddite Rebellions against the Industrial Revolution was led by 'General Ludd's wives,' two cross-dressed workers. The mob of hundreds broke windows, stoned the house of Joseph Goodair (a factory owner), and later set fire to his house. They destroyed the products in the steam loom factory, smashed the looms, and burned the factory to the ground. The rioting went on for four days until it was stopped by the military at Stockport, but then broke out again at Oldham.

1820s

The Lady Rocks militant Irish resistance group was active during this time; they were inspired by the White Boys, and wore bonnets and veils.

1829

The War of the Demoiselles in the Pyrenees was a peasant uprising against restrictive forest codes in which the peasants cross-dressed.

1830s

The Lady Clares a militant Irish resistance group, was active in this decade; they were inspired by the White Boys; their official' costume was cross-dressing.

1839-1844

The Welsh Toll-gate Riots, were carried out by 'Rebecca and her daughters.; One well-documented instance was on May 13, 1839. At dusk, a call of horns, drums, and gunfire are heard across the western Welsh countryside. Armed male peasants, dressed as women, thunder up on horseback, waving pitchforks, axes, scythes, and guns. As they storm the toll gate their leader roars: 'Hurrah for free laws! Toll gates free to coal pits and lime kilns!' These demands are punctuated by a cacophony of music, shouts, and shotgun blasts. The rebel troops smash the toll barriers and ride away victorious. They call themselves 'Rebecca and her daughters.' The Rebeccas are active for four years in Wales, leading thousands of cross-dressed 'daughters' in the destruction of turnpike toll barriers. They receive widespread popular support.

1843

The militant resistance group the Molly Maguires were active in Ireland during this time. Inspired by the White Boys, the word 'Molly. was the equivalent of what we might call 'queen' today.

1959

In Los Angeles in May, police attempted a raid on Cooper's Doughnuts, a late-night hangout for drag queens, butch hustlers, street queens, and johns. The cops demanded IDs. The queers fought back. Doughnuts and coffee cups become projectiles. Fighting spilled out onto the street. The cops, taken by storm, called for backup. Rioters were arrested and the street was closed off for a day.

1966

In August 1966, the management at Compton's Cafeteria (an all-night San Francisco hangout for drag queens, and hustlers in the Tenderloin neighborhood in San Francisco) called the police on a group of young queens who were being rowdy. A police officer who was used to roughing up Compton's regulars grabbed a queen. She threw her coffee in his face. A fight broke out. Plates, trays, cups, and furniture were thrown. The plate-glass windows of the restaurant were smashed. Police called for backup as the riot took the street. The windows of a cop car were smashed and a newspaper stand went up in flames.

1969

On June 28, the police conduct a 'routine' raid of the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, New York. They began to round up trans people, drag queens and kings to be arrested for cross-dressing, which was illegal. Hostility grew and grew until an officer shoved a queen, who responded by hitting him on the head with her purse. The crowd became fierce. Cops were pelted, first with coins and then with bottles and stones. When a bull-dyke resisting arrest called to the crowd for support, the situation exploded. The crowd tried to topple the paddy wagon while the police vehicles got their tires slashed. The crowd, already throwing beer bottles, discovered a cache of bricks at a construction site. Cops were forced to barricade themselves inside the Inn. Garbage cans, garbage, bottles, rocks, and bricks were

hurled at the building, breaking the windows. Rioters ripped up a parking meter and used it as a battering ram. The mob lit garbage on fire and sent it through the broken windows; squirted lighter fluid inside and lit it. Riot police arrived on the scene, but were unable to regain control of the situation. Drag queens danced a conga line and sang songs amidst the street fighting to mock the inability of the police to re-establish order. The rioting continued until dawn, and for the next four days. Crowds filled the streets and smashed more cop cars, set more fires, and looted stores.

1970

Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, veterans of the Stonewall riots, formed the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) in New York City. Marsha and Sylvia opened the STAR house for homeless drag queens and runaway queer youth to stay in. The house mothers hustled to pay rent so their kids wouldn't have to. The youth, in turn, stole food to bring home. STAR linked up with the Young Lords, a revolutionary Puerto Rican group, and with the Black Panther Party."

On second thoughts, let's stay here a while and briefly consider Bash Back! Itself. Bash Back!, in terms of the compilers of this anthology, describe themselves as having been (they no longer exist):

"*not just a group or organization, but a militant tendency on the part of queer individuals. While Bash Back! was occasionally public and campy, bashing back was more of an everyday evolutionary occurrence than any sort of activist entity. Most of what can be attributed to the Bash Back! period never made it onto the internet or into newspapers. Bashing back meant bar fights, outrunning lynch mobs, glamdalization, attacking the homes of heterosexist murderers, outright chaos, alleged lootings, theory discussions, self-defense*

tips, social gatherings, beatdowns, the acquisition of large quantities of pepper spray, and attempts at sexual liberation. It was a temporary counter-culture amongst friend groups and peers that called for nothing short of direct confrontation with the (mostly) straight, (mostly) white and always normative society: the ultimate queer propaganda by queer deed."

That which ideologically links together all those referenced in *Queer Ultraviolence* (whether using names that identify no one specifically or movements or collectives of no particular membership [or, in the case of Gender Mutiny, of a group that does not exist]) is that: "We view queer as the blurring of sexual and gender identities. Queer is the refusal of fixed identities. It is a war on all identity."

And so I move on to a Kurdish anarchist writer by the name of "Barut" who authors a short but sweet condemnation of Turkish, British and German anarchism in mid-2021 titled "Burying the Anarchist Movement". Explaining the motivation for his short piece he writes:

"*With the knowledge of the non-existence of a united anarchist movement in the European continent, I want to talk about my observations about the anarchist scenes I have been in in the UK, Germany, and Turkey. Even with all their differences, they are always consistent on three things; a leftist obsession with 'real' democracy, intra-communal ideological conformity and self-sacrifice to the death cult of progress. This is not an in-depth critique of their practices and ideologies, many before me have done that effectively. Mine is the nihilist scream into the dark night from the belly of western civilization. An explosion of boiling shit from the sewers against industrially sanitised minds, against the protectors of society and its values, and against the cult of the collective.*"

Barut travels to Turkey (a country he knows well as a Kurd) were he finds an organised bunch of anarchists who all dress the same at protests and are pacifists who must not question their leader. When police start arresting them, they don't fight back and neither do they attempt to rescue their colleagues. Seeing this, Barut can ponder:

"*Would it even be desirable to have a strong anarchist 'movement' anyway? My observations in the anarchist scene in Turkey could not have been further away from my own understanding of an anarchy that is dangerous, nihilist, queer, individualist, feral, and relentless in its attacks against Leviathan despite carrying the pessimism of a thousand Schopenhauers on my shoulders. Growing sick of organised and civil anarchism, I take the bus to the airport.*"

He lands in the UK, a country I know well and one known, at least to me, for its almost complete lack of public anarchists, genuine or merely performative. Barut's observations seem to bear this out. He writes:

"*The first thing that struck me oddly about the anarchists in the UK was that a lot of them partook in electoralism and 'grass roots activism' sponsored by the Labour and Green Party or associated organisations. Most of these self proclaimed anarchists were card holding members of the Labour Party's libertarian socialist caucus 'Black Rose'. One must think what the fuck has gone wrong for anarchists to assimilate themselves into electoralist politics, but the answer got clearer the more I observed the general approach they had to anarchism. They had anarchist cafés, endless anarchist magazines and newspapers featuring anarchist academics with their PhD opinions, and various anarchist bookshops (STEALING IS FORBIDDEN!). Basically anarchism in the UK has become a business and for those who still try to keep the revolutionary edge, it is just a dwindling game of numbers.*

The most common execution of anarchist action in the UK is that of a domesticated subject of Leviathan who finds alternative channels to affirm their desires, mostly in the form of subcultures and through assimilation into the activist industrial-complex."

The result of Barut's general observations overall is that he issues the following withering judgement (which betrays he has probably been reading Deleuze and Guattari at the very least):

"*For too long the anarchist movement has tried to exist in its old ways tangled up in the same forms and discourses. It's time to throw the old beast into a ditch. Building organisations, recruiting members from civil society' and trying to make anarchy marketable as normal and non-threatening to civilised life. There is nothing appealing about the tumultuous entropy of anarchy to the domesticated mind. If the sheep claim they are anarchists, it is in the sense that they would just use direct democracy to keep on living as cattle where they cooperatively manage their own slaughter.*

I don't facilitate my own domestication and slaughter. I don't wish to be accepted and assimilated into the civil anarchist movement that tries to appeal to society as would a kid try to appeal to their father begging for their love and acceptance. My feral desire is schizophrenic, it doesn't recognise the law of the father, the law of the state, nor the laws of society. My queerness, and nihilist anti-politics put me in direct opposition with society and its priests regardless of my choice. The colour of my skin in an explosive assemblage with my confrontational nature is seen as nothing less than a threat in the heart of the Empire. Well, they are right. I am a threat, as much as anarchy is a threat. I don't have any trust in the anarchist movement, their goals of democracy and revolution, and the body of organisations and individuals they are made up of.

In today's time, only an abysmal pessimism towards the anarchist movement can be the reaction of anyone at odds with Leviathan's churning wheels of death."

Now, in a change of pace, I should like to reproduce a short, anonymously written story titled "A Tale of Nihilist Lovers":

They couldn't catch us. Madison, Wisconsin. Do you remember the feeling of being consumed by maniacal laughter after our first intercourse with illegality? Nah, it won't change the world and most wouldn't think much of it. And it certainly has nothing to do with revolution, The Movement, or Marxism. But it...felt incredible! It all started out as just an idea formulated in one of our post-sex "What if" conversations. There wasn't a whole lot of planning. More of a "fuck it – let's do this!" Never knew that one night would lead to a lifelong crime spree of bigger and more exciting things. We learned so much about each other that night. More than we could have ever imagined. Our hearts raced together as we moved our loaded cart carefully past the cash registers, and then through the automated doors. That night was our very first food heist! We ate the fanciest vegan food that we would have never been able to afford. We discovered a courage within ourselves that we never thought we had. What does it mean to push, bend, and eventually break the security designed to subdue us with fear? What does it mean to ride adrenaline like a wave into a sea of unknown possibilities?

Fast forward: I remember the reflection of the moonlight in your eyes, our whispers trembling with excitement. Like a nervous first date under the blanket of a starry night, our hearts had an appetite for destruction. Why walk in circles holding signs when sabotage is so much more fun? We completed our mission and scurried away into the dark, haunted by the apparition of uncertainty; did anybody hear us? Were the cops already called? How long

till they catch us? They have certainly come close... We wondered. Guns drawn? A shoot out? We are too feral for the iron bars of a cage; we can't even stand living in a house too long! How will it all end? Who cares... The present is ours!

Fast forward a little more: do you remember this one, my love? Vandalism, fire, sirens in the distance. I'm momentarily paralyzed by those beautiful green eyes, shining from behind your balaclava. Minneapolis 2020: Rioting won't bring about the collapse of society. At least not before another cop's bullet takes another life. But while revolutionaries are busy writing up another analysis, desperate to control the narrative, you and I are gonna have some fun! We shed our civilized skin and become unhinged within the frenzy of social unrest. We each have our own complex histories and traumas. We pass each other fist-sized pieces of concrete to hurl at anything that can break. So much rage, sadness, and frustration. So much around us to release it upon. We smash everything in sight, our knives drawn toward anyone who tries to stop us. It's not about winning or losing, victories or defeats. We don't give a fuck about how the media portrays us.

We have no masses to organize or lead. Destruction for the sake of destruction produces a high more addictive than anything Philip Morris, Anheuser-Busch, or a drug lab could ever produce. Hopelessness and despair doom too many into endless cycles of culturally encouraged chemical self-destruction. The only inorganic chemicals you and I have ever needed are kerosene, tar, and potassium chlorate. Anarchy is a path we carve through this concrete jungle, driven by an instinct for freedom as primal as our desire to fuck. Like Santino "Sonny" LoSpecchio once said: "The working man is a sucker".

Even though we knew it would happen, it's still a shame that after all those fires and broken windows that everything was rebuilt. What's worse? The fact that a new Target and Wendy's exist on top of the ashes of the old, or that it was the working class that's responsible for rebuilding them?

There's something about the way you move, my love. Were you ever truly domesticated? The rulers of civilization once convinced you that something within your brain was broken. The applied disease model as an explanation for your behavioral insubordination exposed their own denial; they each saw, within themselves, an image of you. But they have roles to perform and social credibility to lose in shedding their humanism. You've shed everything. Bravely you've escaped into the black night of amorality. I can hear your mischief in my dreams. I've finally found a face to every vine that breaks apart the asphalt. Our love language expands outward like the debris field from a fallen airliner.

Our enemies say we deserve each other. They couldn't be more correct. We hop trains to riots so we can contribute our efforts toward the destruction of their cities. We chase them down residential streets with daggers drawn. They were fast that day, but maybe next time we see them we will be faster...

America is more ripe now than ever for tearing apart. One big safe space for MAGA worshipers and armed bootlickers. Maybe with enough matches we can make this the year without a winter. Exposed to the heat of this country set on fire, our kisses explode like ammunition. Maybe others will join us in an orgy of chaos where romance burns through the fear of prison, intermingling with a love for our bodies, a love for our very lives – queers, trans, faggots, and other beautiful deviants dancing and fucking like a thousand machetes hacking away at the White House.

The galaxy is in your eyes, my love. Like the flash from a pipe bomb, your smile brightens up my day. Remember our very first conversation? I could feel the depth of your gaze in my spine. Consumed by an inexorable pull toward your honesty, compassion, and your gentle smile, I became paralyzed as my heart conducted chemistry with something more than love. Two cats perched on a tombstone in Shupea Cemetery, reflecting on our lives. I can feel all these memories compress the universe around us like a blanket, as we cuddle to the cacophony of thunderstorms on a mattress of anesthesia.

My love, these experiences together are as seamless as every wave in an ocean. To others this is just a tale of two mercury switch hearts ignited by the spark of a first kiss. I look forward to whatever we may encounter under this black rainbow called life. We'll ride the waves of every hurricane that makes landfall. Until their bullets turn our blood into confetti during a shoot-out, or we simply grow old and sing each other to sleep with a shared death rattle... More riots!

Vandalism! Anarchy!

Shall we hold hands?"

I move on now to "Queer Manifesto" which is self-described as "the Manifesto of the Nihilistic Violent Extremist Party", this "party" name being ironic and inspired by the Trump regime's designation for those imagined "gender deviant" as "nihilistic, violent extremists". This document was produced as recently as the middle of October 2025 and so is the most recent of those considered, published less than two months before I quote it here.

The authors of this document are stated as “anomie press” and whoever they are they are clearly familiar with “Queers Read This”, Bash Back and the work of Baedan that I have discussed at length earlier in this book. Consequently, their starting point is familiar to us:

“*liberals have co-opted the term ‘queer’. the assimilationists insist on slotting a Q into their LGBT_+ slogans and signs. the very ‘movement’ (if you can call the push for myopic legislation, and corporate rainbow-branding a ‘movement’) that we set out to distance ourselves from, and criticize, has now almost entirely subverted queer subversion, and absorbed the terminology of queer dissent into its bloated parade of rainbows and cops.*”

In contradiction to this assimilation of queer into normalised capitalist society the authors instead maintain that:

“*since the inception of the movement, ‘queer’ has always signified rejection of, and opposition to, not only straight society, but also all the ways cishet norms have been adopted into the LGBT+ scene.*”

Clearly, then, this queer stance argues that queer is oppositional, a life lived at cross purposes to normalised capitalist life or, as they term it, “civil democratic society” adding, pointedly, “as if civilization and democracy aren’t what got us here in the first place. Now, more than ever, queer nihilism is needed to dismantle the identity frameworks that are constantly forced on us.” They then call for what they describe as “a Judith Butlerian Jihad”. In their terms, this is actually a war on gender since they are gender abolitionists and gender nihilists who think trans-gender and cis-gender equally “silly”. They point up a “point of contention between the trans and queer positions” and quote the introduction to *Queer Ultraviolence* where the anthologisers of Bash Back regard queer as “the refusal

of fixed identities" in distinction to at least some trans people who regard trans itself as an actual fixed identity and take it as something essentially biological about themselves just like a cis person might in regard to their maleness or femaleness. The authors of this "Queer Manifesto", however, say that "as far as we're concerned, being any gender is a drag". This can be taken two ways with equal authenticity – gender is a burden, a chore, and it is also an act, acting. "Our task," say anomie press, "is to subvert all identities, as well as the sociopolitical machinery that produces them."

All this is written in the context of multiple lives that are clearly lived on the margins of "normalised society" by people who must wrestle with that normality in order to negotiate it every day. Consequently, this is all written from the perspective of those who see queer as a politics as opposed to it being merely another identity to be consumed and exploited by, or in, capitalist society. In this section of the manifesto Julia Serano is critiqued as one who fails to see queer as the politicised thing the writers do. Serano, in the terms set out here, is an assimilationist but we must recall, as anomie press do, that "trans" is subject to many uses and not even all trans people use it in the same way or mean the same thing by it. In this document it is used in a sense coterminous with their understanding of queer, i.e. as the refusal of fixed identities. This conflict is real and everyday (which is not the least reason for why it is political and of daily political relevance) and the writers report being caught between the two stools of capitalist assimilation of identity and trans rejection of gender nihilism – based on their own assimilationist identitarianism – on several occasions. Consequently, they add:

"*there are, of course, many people who use the word 'trans' more broadly, to mean 'anything other than cis', which, of course includes queers. but 'trans', when conceptualized as an alternate identity within a gender framework that oppresses all of us (what Monique*

Wittig called 'the myth'), and especially when those trans people are willing to fight to defend that oppressive structure, must be recognized as a reactionary component of the status quo. trans represents progressive gender-reform whereas queer represents anarchic gender-nihilism."

Now as conscientious readers of Baedan we know that reform is going nowhere and the solarpunk dawn will never arrive. This has to shape who we are and how we think about now. Indeed, at this juncture anomie press quote from the *Journal of Queer Nihilism* that I exegeted earlier. Suggesting that "there are two queer genders; the creative nothing and the destructive nothing" (which might channel Stirner or Novatore or both), we now learn that "Trump's FBI has established a new vocabulary for gender-deviant terrorists; NVE's, or Nihilistic Violent Extremists". Naturally, our writers lean into this designation. Set against a background of now almost a year of the Trump administration's actions (against all sorts of minorities whether queer or not) and also in the face of those pacifist and assimilationist elements which say "violence begets violence" and who are all for peace, love and understanding (often, it seems, in denial of the fact that the forces of oppression have already began their campaign to erase queers and others – including the trans community), anomie press stand up to say:

"*'queer' has always meant terrorist. queers are the sexual and gender deviants who, when faced with the choice to lie down and die, or fight back, choose to fight.*"

This has the credit of consistency for if queer is a politics (or an anti-politics in terms of form and orientation) then it must be an action or, better, a life, another way to live. Anomie press describe queer as something oppositional and so, in that case, it must oppose the political forces (from whichever direction they come bearing in mind the

assimilationists too). This is not in the cause of anti-politics but simply a matter of living anti-political lives that cannot be oppressed (or possessed) by politics and its identitarianism. Suggesting that "'queer' is a verb meaning 'subvert'" they add:

"*we don't want trans people to be incarcerated in the prisons that match their identities; we want to raze every prison to the ground (after locking the cops inside them, of course!), and we don't want acceptance within a system that arbitrates who's considered 'sane' or incapacitated, and determines what legal rights each person is entitled to on those grounds; we want to put the DSM to good use for once, as kindling when we put their asylums to the torch!*

'queer' is not 'spicy gay' or a catch-all for LGBT+ identities, but a rejection of identity, and revolt against the ideologies and infrastructures that shackle physical and mental traits to arbitrary categorical boxes. we recognize gender itself as a product of sexism, and we fight for a future in which no one is required to choose one of two (or even three!) ambiguous, amorphous labels to define themselves on a government ID."

It is here that they bring their political understanding of queer into line with an understanding of anarchy:

"*the traditional queer flag is pink and black, but that's redundant; a black flag is already inherently queer. the negation represented by a black flag is precisely what defines the queer project, and any anarchist, nihilist, or egoist philosophy that isn't fundamentally queer simply is not logically consistent. anarchists refuse to allow their lives to be shaped by any ruler—corporeal or abstract—that has to include gender roles and social norms. nihilists aim to negate every convention and subvert all forms of oppression; if their analysis*

stops at desire and identity, they just aren't nihilistic enough. and all egoists know that gender is a spook...

queers are nihilists. we are violent. anything that wouldn't be regarded as 'extremist' by society's defenders isn't extreme enough to qualify as queer. we despise capitalism, and religion, and the society they've created. the reactionaries are right about us...

this world has denied us the possibility of being safe. so don't be safe. be dangerous...

be queer. do terrorism.
become nothing, and do anything."

The last document I want to make use of before finishing my chapter is "Be Gay Do Crime" by The Mary Nardini Gang, yet another group of Mid-Western queer Americans familiar with Bash Back and known to others of those I have latterly quoted here. They take their name after Mary Nardini, "an Italian anarchist who lived and organized in Milwaukee's Bay View neighborhood in the early 20th century". The Mary Nardini Gang themselves describe themselves as a kind of found family:

"*Ten years ago, we were seized by a frenzied spirit and, in a trancelike state, received a set of ten weapons for a war we were only just finding the words to describe. We were a cabal of teenage runaways, ne'er-do-wells, what Genet called criminal children, coming ex nihilo, from and with nothing but each other. We experienced the whole social order as inimical to freedom, desire, and our preferred relations, but suspected we were not alone in our visceral hatred for this world. So we encoded these tools — visions of excess and otherness — into a slim zine and sent it to the ends of the earth. For a decade we've followed it,*

across borders linguistic and militarized, to find the comrades (in a sense inalienable from, as Chris Chitty argued, the word's originary homoerotic implications) who received this same transmission: queer insurrection.

During that time, we stole away on trains with forged documents, on fraudulent flights, and in the cars of strangers who picked us up en route to one encounter after another. We found each other in forest encampments, communes at the center of cities, at blockades against the storm called progress, and in revelry within the hollowed out shells of deindustrialization. We fought enemies minute and gargantuan on streets and in alleyways. We were there when cities were burned, buildings occupied, boutiques looted, ports blockaded, wanna-be bashers humiliated, nazis punched. We delivered an empty coffin to the doorsteps of a killer cop, threw fire into the home of a john who killed a trans woman, and more through bank windows in the name of those imprisoned for refusing a similar fate. We instigated the wildest queer riots in a generation outside the gates of summits of the global elite, and again when an apologist for fascism emerged as a "dangerous faggot" in the hallowed halls of the intelligentsia.

We found our way into reading groups and meetings, waited for the men to stop speaking, and spoke only to be misunderstood. Misunderstood except by our friends, for whom we stockpiled pepperspray and stunguns because we wanted them alive, turned tricks to pay bail because we wanted them free, walked out of grocery stores because we wanted them fed, scammed universities to bring them to our cities, sold our time at strategic institutions so we could give them everything, got really good at showing specific forms of care (so good we found better hustles), waited with cigarettes and blankets outside the jails because we hated the idea of them in there alone, prepared for attacks like we would for a night with lovers, dedicated books to each other and our beloved dead because these words mean

nothing outside of the relationships which give them traction. We swore oaths to keep each others' secrets and keep each other alive. To hold fiercely to that brilliant intimacy we shared in moments of which we can never speak, to never speak our names either, to always speak sideways in handwritten letters on the sides of buildings, delivered by hand between traveling friends, or mailed innocuously under the eyes of guards and censors."

There is more of this sort of thing but I cannot quote it all otherwise you might just as well read their writing and not mine (and you should read theirs anyway). Needless, once they found each other they also found that they had also found a life, a life in revolt. A queer life in revolt, a life aiming to build nothing. As the Gang say later on, "We took life itself as our project. Whatever rhetoric it may employ, no Party can say the same." They add that they "did not know what we were doing". Should that matter or is that all to the good and entirely the point? The upshot is they were not trying to build a new Jerusalem and are all the better for that. They make the point that "the secret is really to begin" and ascribe this insight both to "insurrectionaries" and to "studied practitioners of magic". Here is something interesting for they tap into the idea that the world we live in is an imaginary once created in our heads. It is as something conjured out of nothing. Indeed, it is nothing but this conjuring made material in human relations and sustained by our enchantment. And so the words I want to share from The Mary Nardini Gang are offered as magical words, what they call "a sort of minor arcana". It is, in fact, their self-described "ten weapons":

"*I. Queerness in its negative sense*

II. Normalcy

III. Social war

IV. Queerness as conflict

V. The other, the excluded

VI. Repression, force relations

VII. Attack!

VIII. A subterranean riotous inheritance

IX. Space, terrain, excess

X. Refusal, the self-described anarchist...

X

Hold onto that moment when you first called yourself an anarchist. Whatever your story, surely it was a refusal, a preference not to, saying "no." You may not realize it, but this is the first time in your life you set a boundary with a world that attempts to erode your capacity to do so. Find that moment and that affect and hold firmly to it. Whatever else may be taken from you, they cannot take this. Let's dispense with the tired conversation about the individual and the collective. We need each other and still each of us needs recourse to that intimately personal affect. Can we leave it at that? In the trying times, when we feel alone against the world, we will always have that initiating refusal. If we tend that little candle, we can always find our way, back to each other if necessary. The anarchist tension adapts to whatever comes next.

IX

We received and will do our best to transmit this mystery: queer criminality. This is an ancestral current, a we, inherited from a long and varied line of rioters, thieves, writers, hustlers, mystics, ranters, freaks, and artists. Like the descendants of any ancestral line, we are the currently incarnated members of that spirit house. Nothing began with us: we are simply the present bearers of that weak messianic potential to make it whole again, to redeem all our dead, by way of heaven on earth. In all that we do, we are in co-creation

with these spirits. Let's learn to do it well. When we try to take space — or more realistically, to hold onto it against the annihilating flows of progress — it is for these reciprocal relationships between each other and all of our ghosts. We are fighting for the survival of a way of life: one criminal, queer, anarchic, mystic, other. Each of these predicates a source of strength, a lineage, a collection of techniques for the survival of people this world has tried thoroughly to destroy. This is why we strive for excellence and excess in all that we do. It has always been about queer forms of life. Beware those who speak about other lives but not of the corpses in their mouth, or of the screaming bones upon which they walk.

VIII

The critique of assimilation is still only understood halfway. The dominant line within the radical queer corners of the professional activist world and the school-to-publishing pipeline holds that it is enough to simply take the right political positions. So long as one speaks the right language, ethical (here meaning happy) life exists within Leviathan. The impulse to critique assimilation, in its first instance, refuses this acquiescence. Be wary of any who remind too quickly that we all make sacrifices under capitalism. That is true, of course, but remember that to sacrifice is to make something sacred, to give it up for the spirits. This world conditions us to lose things easily because it is always taking them away. We choose to take back power over what we give up, for whom, and why. You'll recognize your true friends by the way they answer these three questions. There is a subtle difference between careerist and conspirator-within-a-given-institution. One way or another, those with nothing to lose but each other, and by extension a whole world to gain, remember one another and act accordingly. It's a matter of priority: this dead world, or the ones we are cultivating.

VII

Attack! Because it is always available, and because it is the real marker of the boundaries of our little propulsive heterotopias — worlds plural. World-making gives us the ability to move our prefer-not-to into a sideways gesture, a preferring differently, otherworldly. The question of opacity (the closet, passing) is an old one for us. The queers who came before us navigated with several strategies, and it's up to us to look critically at all of them. It's all drag: a mask on our emergent world. The mask conceals the real in order to make attack possible. Realness is always a game played with normalcy. Those who haven't realized this are dangerous indeed. An attack of whatever intensity is a small door through which the real and its world enters. Its world is animistic — take this into account when choosing your target. All the cosmos is alive and watching and actually matters. If you've followed us this far into the labyrinth, you can always call to presence the energy for even the smallest attack. Let that possibility be Ariadne's thread as we go further. Let these rituals signal to conspirators, embodied and not.

VI

Repression is the attempt on the part of a decaying world to smother new ones in their infancy. We've withstood them all. The Holocaust and the aids crisis respectively destroyed two moments in the preceding century when our world outgrew their comfort for it. In both cases the revolutionaries and the otherwise marginalized died first. Entire generations of our elders have been stolen from us. Remember this when you forget who you are. Remind your friends, too, if they forget. The state has soft means at its disposal. The criminalization of public parks goes hand in hand with the proliferation of cybernetic cruising apps. The benevolent campaigns of "trafficking reformers" keep sex workers on the streets or worse. The wealthy will afford their prep while people with aids continue to die on their doorsteps. The circulation of the images of particular bodies through social media numbs us with blue

light and distracts from the systematic execution of those same excluded bodies. We've only made it this far by fighting repression in all its forms. Pay attention to those worlds that are fighting it differently. Learn from those who fought it before. We'll need all the various techniques against our shared enemy. We need the healing techniques too. We've inherited so much trauma from these failed attempts. But we can choose to heal in these lifetimes, to not pass the shit on.

V

The core of our world is an otherness, and so each of us liminally navigates the other worlds. We stand between, always a little extra, too much for any world but the one we're building between us. Pay attention to where you feel other and whom you feel at home with. This is affinity: knowledge of another, and of their desires and capacities. This isn't deterministic; ancestral traumas can be overcome, but only by those committed to that overcoming. This is a matter of hospitality, of the response of a world to the other at its gates. Never separate any concept of reconciliation — for example, tikkun olam — from its spiritual grounding in the vision of a living world, of an enchanted materialism. Resist the impulse for homogeneity. Circulate through whatever worlds will have us. Jailbreak the others.

IV

To recognize queerness in conflict means to address the residue of a dead world within — trauma in our bodies, possession by egregores, lies on our tongues. Be humble; know that you are addressing wounds inflicted upon countless generations. Be gentle with yourself and each other in these matters, but remember that healers often have the bloodiest hands.

III

Social war, understood as a movement to expand upon this or that limited conception of struggle, gestures welcomingly to the other, includes the stories of resilience and subversion which disorder any tendency toward a scientific (read: systematized) fetish on the part of militants.

II

We do this because we remember that Normalcy is itself our enemy. Avoid those who read the backs of Foucault books while gleefully flaunting their normalizing impulses. In any insurrectionary space, attend to the freaks. The Norm arms itself with terror, because some truly believe in it. The devotees of Normalcy — in its psychic, libidinal, affective, disciplinary or ideological forms — will be cops when the insurrection dies.

I

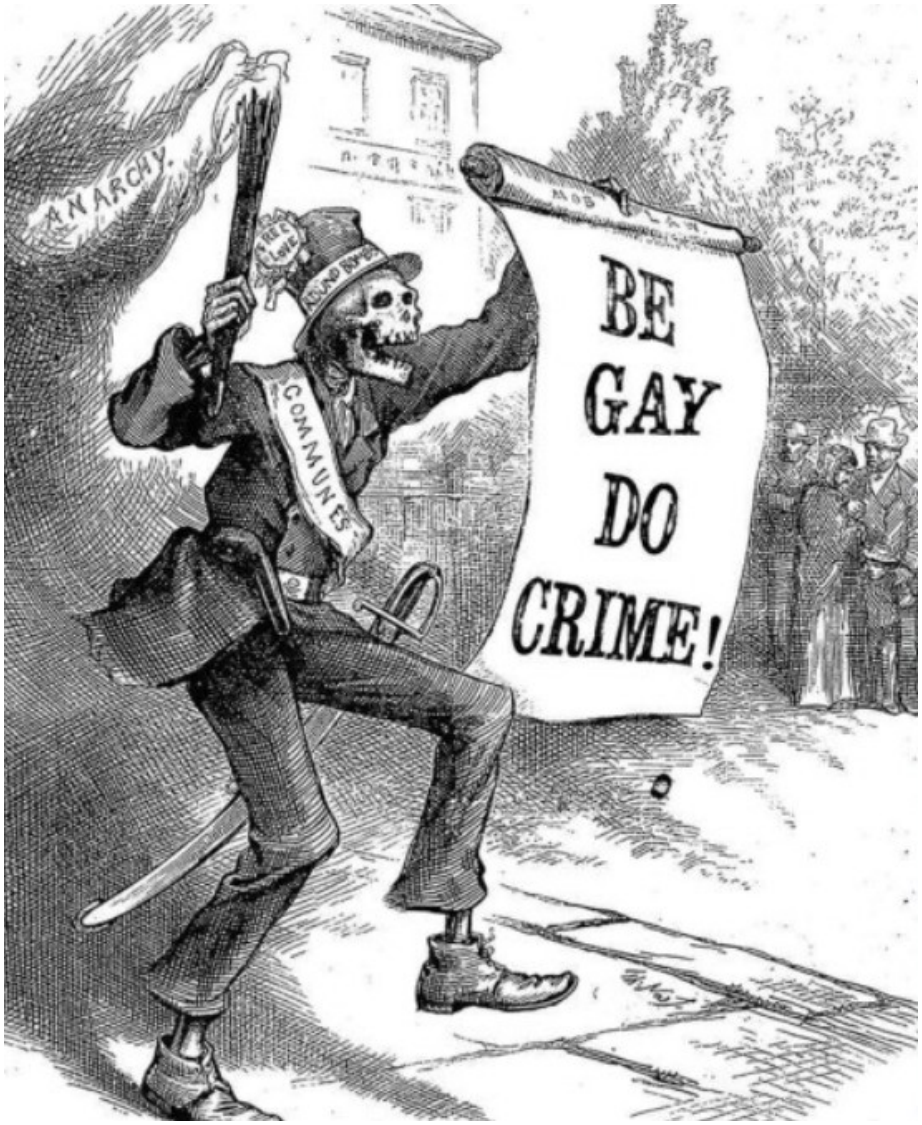
'Q' then, will never be a coherent letter tacked as a bridge on some list of identities. The past decade shows the poverty or ruin of every attempt to do so. We've said already that these words are magic. We might add that they are wyrd — the Old English for fate and all the other invisible and nonlinear causalities we are woven into and which gives us the modern word 'weird'. The queerest insurrection demands the weirdest, the most enmeshed in the unseen, the most in relationship with all that teems just beyond the normative filter we are still fighting to unlearn. Find those who straddle that filter, a foot in each world. Share your methods, share what you've learned, share the stories of your dead. The dead we hold in common make us family — some other form of kinship than the Norm and its terror. We need each other today more than ever. We want to win this time, to win all the time, and the dead want that too.

0

Here. Now. In this place and time. The mirror of our current inquiry faces the mirror that this project always carried within itself. Mirrors upon mirrors; we are not strangers here. Our enemies have always mobilized the myth of Narcissus against the criminal and queer. These inquisitors and specialists in torture can only do this by subtracting this myth from the enchanted worldview whence it emerges, a view wherein other worlds exist, there are windows between them, and true communication is possible. In the notes to his translation of The True Grimoire, the faggot sorcerer Jake Stratton-Kent suggests that this story is in fact an early encryption of scrying — the magical technique in which one uses a mirror to communicate with other spirits and places. Narcissus gazed too long at the underworld and was immortalized as a delicate flower with such a fixed gaze. This is the sign of the immortality of the vegetable world, of the cycle between life and death, of the infinite. Each is slightly other, each a different variation on the story. We possess the freedom of discernment, choice. Theorists of games refer to the magic circle — the boundary within which the players agree upon the objectives and the rules. Zero: the magic circle. Zero: the space of all potential. Be careful what you say in this space; have your wits about you. What happens here extends to all levels. Zero: from nothing and returning to it. Zero: always the Fool, a stranger entering seemingly from nowhere. Who are you? Where are you from and where are you going?

The skeleton has been here, frenzied, before. The meme reproduced below detourned a bit of propaganda from California dating back to the 1880s that vilifies the queer and anarchist currents then present on these shores. The skeleton has never left. She remains present along the diasporic threads which have always undermined the southern border. She is the Holy Death. The patron of criminals and queers, of exiles from worlds. She wears other robes but she insists as the constant reminder of our own mortality and of those

we've already lost. If the messianic currents within western magical traditions are true — and that the final judgment is the return of the dead — then the passing of that moment means our dead are among us, the ancestors have returned and they are insisting that we have a chance to make it all whole again. The task remains to put our ways in common."



So, to conclude this discussion, the question remains to be asked: what is "queer nihilism"?

It is proceeding on the basis of refusal – refusal of the idea of “the future” and refusal to build any static, universal future because knowing, whilst we are yet in the grip of a system of capitalists and governments, that ANY future can only be co-opted and possessed by coercive and exploitative others who wish to maintain a prison of capitalist authoritarianism. It is proceeding with weapons such as diversity and autonomy determined not only to damage and destroy that prison – inasmuch as we come onto contact with it – but to escape its clutches at every possible turn. It is proceeding on the understanding that “now” is all there actually is – but not as a “now” that is set into a fictional and linear understanding of time for OUR understanding of time is basically spontaneous. It is proceeding recognising that one primary weapon of the capitalist authoritarian is language and that such a system wants to trap you in words, descriptions and identities, to set you into a story of its classification and its choosing, one you become unable to escape, but where your task is to interpret your way out of it by creating new interpretations of your own and new visions which enable other kinds of life and the possibility of genuine jouissance. Not that these self-made interpretations go anywhere but jouissance – that is not the point. The point is always that you can “see otherwise” and so do otherwise on your own recognisance and at your own determination. It is proceeding on the basis of desire, autonomy, anonymity and spontaneity all the better to avoid the coercive and exploitative capture and assimilation that capitalist authoritarianism wants to imprison you in. It is proceeding contrary to coercion, contrary to Leviathan, contrary to the organisations of others. It is proceeding in recognition of the fact that “queer” means “refusal to be subjected” and “nihilism” means “nothing, goes nowhere”. But where was there really to go anyway? To be what you are until that comes to an end – and to find enjoyment in it – is all there ever was. The rest is just illusions.

12. Uncivilised

"*When confronted with the horror of your existence, race towards the bleak consequences, not away.*" (Aragorn Moser, "Nihilism and Strategy")

"Green Anarchy", as I understand it, is an American phenomenon (more specifically, of the American North West) that was active most obviously in the first decade of this century. It comprised a loose collection of writers and activists who married anarchist, nihilist and ecological motifs and interests to create commentary and incitement to insurrection in regard, primarily, to civilisation itself. More popular American "anarchist" voices such as John Zerzan, Wolfi Landstreicher or Aragorn Moser would be associated with these efforts (by others as well as themselves) and their concerns – even though this was seemingly no formal group or organisation – in accordance with their particular principles and proclivities which favoured association and affinity. What they mainly then did was cooperate to the extent that they could produce activist literature in the form of a magazine or journal. The book *Uncivilized*, published in 2012, and with which I will interact at length in this chapter, is then a collection of the published work of what we might call the Green Anarchy movement or collective as a whole from the publication they titled "Green Anarchy", their major manifestation in the world. The book is in fact subtitled "the best of Green Anarchy". So let us see what their best is about.

Here I simply have to start, as *Uncivilized* does, by pointing out our problem – CIVILISATION. Not "capitalism". Not "government". Not "institutions". Not "the Family". But the concatenation of them all and everything else, the whole damn human construct: CIVILISATION. So, as is said at the very start of *Uncivilized*, "'solutions' translated into political terms that only criticize the excesses of capitalism and its commercialization of

nature… never get to the ugly heart of the matter." It is about then considering the fact that our whole context of living is askew. Dangerously, suicidally askew. "The wallpaper and stage scenery might vary from nation to nation, but ultimately it's civilization that is maintaining this unified reign of misery." Green Anarchy, as defined by the Green Anarchy Collective in their piece "What is Green Anarchy?", is then a matter of "anti-civilization anarchist thought and practice" and so buys into the idea that it is the artificial networks of more or less arbitrary relations as a whole that is the problem and the issue. This is not only the system of artificial material relations themselves in the material realities they create and the consequences they lead to. It is also a matter of the thought that gives birth to and maintains them – seeing the world *as a matter of* "civilisation". Do you think the wild does that? Of course it doesn't. It is a purely human imaginary – and not a necessary one either.

Interestingly, this is not a matter of "new ideology" or a "singular worldview". What is meant there is that it is the inclination of the Green Anarchy Collective not to see the problem as how you replace one set of ideologically constructed relations with another, better set. Isn't that what civilisation itself has always been doing? The old god is dead: welcome the new god. If so, then to be anti-civilisation is NOT to do that. So it can also not be about making civilisation itself "greener" or more "fair". These are reformist sentiments that clearly take place within the same civilisationalist space. Nope. Civilisation will have to go and if it will have to go then so too will all its ways. So:

"*We feel that it is important to move towards a radically decentralized world, to challenge the logic and mindset of the death-culture, to end all mediation in our lives, and to destroy all the institutions and physical manifestations of this nightmare. We want to become uncivilized.*"

These are clearly smart people for they immediately want to distinguish anarchy from anarchism. Seeing as I have done that myself too in an entirely independent way (and pretty much from the beginning, in fact) it would seem to place me in the "post-left" and "anti-civilization" spaces they refer to. They want to point out the openness of anarchy but also the historical situatedness of anarchism – which is a political tradition with definitive historical reference points and relevancies. What anarchism is not is a free floating, ahistorical dogma of how to live right – in any sense. It arose in historical circumstances (Euro-American ones to boot) and attempted to respond to historical exigencies in particular ways. It is not necessarily relevant beyond them. Anarchy itself is therefore the far greater and more useful phenomenon since it is an idea which is beyond history even to the extent that it could be compared with reality or existence or being/becoming itself. This difference between anarchy and anarchism gives a particularly anarchist focus to anarchy itself as well for it means that one should not ask "What would Proudhon/Bakunin/Malatesta/Goldman do?" (for they are figures from history who responded to their own problems) but "What should I/we do?" in our own circumstances with our own responsibilities. Malatesta wrote that he didn't want to emancipate the people, he wanted them to emancipate themselves – and in that he had things dead right. Consequently:

"*Anarchists cannot provide another world for others, but we can raise questions and ideas, try to destroy all domination and that which impedes our lives and our dreams, and live directly connected with our desires.*"

It is a matter of what in Green Anarchy is called "the de-civilizing project". But what is "civilisation" exactly? This is a question asked knowingly for different people have different ideas. Here, according to the Green Anarchy Collective:

"*Green anarchists tend to view civilization as the logic, institutions, and physical apparatus of domestication, control, and domination.*"

Moreover:

"*The rise of civilization can roughly be described as the shift over the past 10,000 years from an existence within and deeply connected to the web of life, to one separated from and in control of the rest of life. Prior to civilization there generally existed ample leisure time, considerable gender autonomy and equality, a non-destructive approach to the natural world, the absence of organized violence, no mediating or formal institutions, and strong health and robusticity. Civilization inaugurated warfare, the subjugation of women, population growth, drudge work, concepts of property, entrenched hierarchies, and virtually every known disease, to name a few of its devastating derivatives. Civilization begins with and relies on an enforced renunciation of instinctual freedom. It cannot be reformed and is thus our enemy.*"

In such a narrative there is often a particular characteristic or process particularly tied to such a concept of civilisation which is our direct enemy, namely "domestication":

"*Domestication is the process that civilization uses to indoctrinate and control life according to its logic. These time-tested mechanisms of subordination include: taming, breeding, genetically modifying, schooling, caging, intimidating, coercing, extorting, promising, governing, enslaving, terrorizing, murdering…the list goes on to include almost every civilized social interaction. Their movement and effects can be examined and felt throughout society, enforced through various institutions, rituals, and customs. It is also the process by which previously nomadic human populations shift towards a sedentary or*

settled existence through agriculture and animal husbandry. This kind of domestication demands a totalitarian relationship with both the land and the plants and animals being domesticated. Whereas in a state of wildness, all life shares and competes for resources, domestication destroys this balance. The domesticated landscape (e.g. pastoral lands/agricultural fields, and to a lesser degree—horticulture and gardening) necessitates the end of open sharing of the resources that formerly existed; where once 'this was everyone's,' it is now 'mine'… Domestication not only changes the ecology from a free to a totalitarian order, it enslaves the species that are domesticated. Generally the more an environment is controlled, the less sustainable it is."

But the negative consequences of civilisation don't end there:

"*Toward the beginning in the shift to civilization, an early product of domestication is patriarchy: the formalization of male domination and the development of institutions which reinforce it. By creating false gender distinctions and divisions between men and women, civilization, again, creates an 'other' that can be objectified, controlled, dominated, utilized, and commodified. This runs parallel to the domestication of plants for agriculture and animals for herding, in general dynamics, and also in specifics like the control of reproduction. As in other realms of social stratification, roles are assigned to women in order to establish a very rigid and predictable order, beneficial to hierarchy. Women come to be seen as property, no different then the crops in the field or the sheep in the pasture. Ownership and absolute control, whether of land, plants, animals, slaves, children, or women, is part of the established dynamic of civilization.*"

A consequence of all of this put together is that "[civilisation] severely limits the spectrum of possible experience." Not only a matter of material restrictions, civilisation crucially

also functions by restricting thought because it restricts the diversity of experiences one may find oneself involved in and so be led to think about.

We are now into the territory of specific civilisationally-induced problematics. The first of these is “Division of Labor and Specialization”:

“*The disconnecting of the ability to care for ourselves and provide for our own needs is a technique of separation and disempowerment perpetuated by civilization. We are more useful to the system, and less useful to ourselves, if we are alienated from our own desires and each other through division of labor and specialization. We are no longer able to go out into the world and provide for ourselves and our loved ones the necessary nourishment and provisions for survival. Instead, we are forced into the production/consumption commodity system to which we are always indebted.*”

Next comes “The problem of Technology”:

“*Technology is more than wires, silicon, plastic, and steel. It is a complex system involving division of labor, resource extraction, and exploitation for the benefit of those who implement its process. The interface with and result of technology is always an alienated, mediated, and distorted reality. Despite the claims of postmodern apologists and other technophiles, technology is not neutral. The values and goals of those who produce and control technology are always embedded within it. Technology is distinct from simple tools in many regards. A simple tool is a temporary usage of an element within our immediate surroundings used for a specific task. Tools do not involve complex systems which alienate the user from the act. Implicit in technology is this separation, creating an unhealthy and mediated experience which leads to various forms of authority. Domination increases every*

time a new 'time-saving' technology is created, as it necessitates the construction of more technology to support, fuel, maintain and repair the original technology… The technological system methodically destroys, eliminates, or subordinates the natural world, constructing a world fit only for machines. The ideal for which the technological system strives is the mechanization of everything it encounters."

Related to this is a particular organisation (and in civilisation it is always a forced organisation) of relations known as "Production and Industrialism":

"*A key component of the modern techno-capitalist structure is industrialism, the mechanized system of production built on centralized power and the exploitation of people and nature. Industrialism cannot exist without genocide, ecocide, and colonialism. To maintain it, coercion, land evictions, forced labor, cultural destruction, assimilation, ecological devastation, and global trade are accepted as necessary, even benign. Industrialism's standardization of life objectifies and commodifies it, viewing all life as a potential resource. A critique of industrialism is a natural extension of the anarchist critique of the state because industrialism is inherently authoritarian. In order to maintain an industrial society, one must set out to conquer and colonize lands in order to acquire (generally) non-renewable resources to fuel and grease the machines. This colonialism is rationalized by racism, sexism, and cultural chauvinism. In the process of acquiring these resources, people must be forced off their land. And in order to make people work in the factories that produce the machines, they must be enslaved, made dependent, and otherwise subjected to the destructive, toxic, degrading industrial system. Industrialism cannot exist without massive centralization and specialization: Class domination is a tool of the industrial system that denies people access to resources and knowledge, making them helpless and easy to exploit. Furthermore, industrialism demands that resources be shipped*

from all over the globe in order to perpetuate its existence, and this globalism undermines local autonomy and self-sufficiency. It is a mechanistic worldview that is behind industrialism. This is the same world-view that has justified slavery, exterminations, and the subjugation of women. It should be obvious to all that industrialism is not only oppressive for humans, but that it is also fundamentally ecologically destructive."

Meanwhile, civilisation generally of course relies on the creation of a "mass society" but Green Anarchy has a particular orientation towards that as an idea in itself:

"*We do not wish to run society, or organize a different society, we want a completely different frame of reference. We want a world where each group is autonomous and decides on its own terms how to live, with all interactions based on affinity, free and open, and non-coercive. We want a life which we live, not one which is run. Mass society brutally collides not only with autonomy and the individual, but also with the earth. It is simply not sustainable (in terms of the resource extraction, transportation, and communication systems necessary for any global economic system) to continue on with, or to provide alternative plans for a mass society.*"

This deconstruction of civilisation as a set of destructive and self-undermining relational ideas or consequences leads to a notable couple of comparisons/oppositions with a clear preference given in each case. First comes Liberation vs Organisation:

"*We fight for liberation, for a decentralized and unmediated relationship with our surroundings and those we love and share affinity with. Organizational models only provide us with more of the same bureaucracy, control, and alienation that we receive from the current set-up.*"

Next comes Revolution vs Reform:

"*As anarchists, we are fundamentally opposed to government, and likewise, any sort of collaboration or mediation with the state (or any institution of hierarchy and control). This position determines a certain continuity or direction of strategy, historically referred to as revolution. This term, while warped, diluted, and co-opted by various ideologies and agendas, can still have meaning to the anarchist and anti-ideological praxis. By revolution, we mean the ongoing struggle to alter the social and political landscape in a fundamental way; for anarchists, this means its complete dismantling. The word 'revolution' is dependent on the position from which it is directed, as well as what would be termed 'revolutionary' activity. Again, for anarchists, this is activity which is aimed at the complete dissolving of power. Reform, on the other hand, entails any activity or strategy aimed at adjusting, altering, or selectively maintaining elements of the current system, typically utilizing the methods or apparatus of that system. The goals and methods of revolution cannot be dictated by, nor performed within, the context of the system. For anarchists, revolution and reform invoke incompatible methods and aims, and despite certain anarcho-liberal approaches, do not exist on a continuum. For anti-civilization anarchists, revolutionary activity questions, challenges, and works to dismantle the entire set-up or paradigm of civilization. Revolution is also not a far-off or distant singular event which we build towards or prepare people for, but instead, a life-way or practice of approaching situations.*"

What all this results in is a desire for "Rewilding and Reconnection":

"*For most green/anti-civilization/primitivist anarchists, rewilding and reconnecting with the earth is a life project. It is not limited to intellectual comprehension or the practice of primitive skills, but instead, it is a deep understanding of the pervasive ways in which we are*

domesticated, fractured, and dislocated from our selves, each other, and the world, and the enormous and daily undertaking to be whole again. Rewilding has a physical component which involves reclaiming skills and developing methods for a sustainable co-existence, including how to feed, shelter, and heal ourselves with the plants, animals, and materials occurring naturally in our bioregion. It also includes the dismantling of the physical manifestations, apparatus, and infrastructure of civilization. Rewilding has an emotional component, which involves healing ourselves and each other from the 10,000 year-old wounds which run deep, learning how to live together in non-hierarchical and non-oppressive communities, and deconstructing the domesticating mindset in our social patterns. Rewilding involves prioritizing direct experience and passion over mediation and alienation, re-thinking every dynamic and aspect of our reality, connecting with our feral fury to defend our lives and to fight for a liberated existence, developing more trust in our intuition and being more connected to our instincts, and regaining the balance that has been virtually destroyed after thousands of years of patriarchal control and domestication. Rewilding is the process of becoming uncivilized."

I regard all this as a fairly straightforward, obvious, and simply understood account of the "green anarchist" position, its desires and its shibboleths. (This means that in terms I discussed in an earlier chapter I favour this position over that of Murray Bookchin with his "social ecology" which was also discussed above as another form of "green anarchy".) About more than the simple (and somewhat unimaginable) dismantling of the physical apparatus of civilised society, it is also necessarily about "the internalized systems of domestication: morals, rules, laws, orders—encoded into our psyche by parents, schools, religions, social norms, and spectacular illusion" (Sauri Igni) and their dismantling – regarding which we have more direct influence since they are directly to do with us and who we were coerced to become. What is being agitated for here then is *both* an

intellectual *and* a material uprising – and necessarily so. It is necessarily to result in both changed human beings AND a changed relationship between human beings and the rest of the universe. It is, as Wolfi Landstreicher notes in a piece titled "Rising of Barbarians", a critique of civilisation, technology and even the idea of "progress" (a sustaining intellectual myth of civilisation and one to which even anarchists can be prey). Landstreicher points out that this is hardly a new or modern phenomenon and has been going on since at least the Romantic period (late eighteenth to early nineteenth century). Do Blake's "dark Satanic mills" ring any bells? Landstreicher points out that "Bakunin himself did call for 'the annihilation of bourgeois civilization' along with 'the destruction of all States' and the 'free and spontaneous organization from below upward, by means of free associations.'" Bakunin wants to take the whole kit and kaboodle and replace it with something else whole and entire just as Charles Fourier did when he spoke of "Harmony", a social and political conception of society, which was meant to replace civilisation (and about which he left several written ideas).

A problem here though is that many anarchist forebears, as already mentioned above in this chapter, were prisoners of their time, place and situation. They were responding in real time to unfolding realities with the weapons to hand in contexts they often did not remotely control. We must remember, however, that their response was far from uniform. Whilst some anarchists of the social type (Kropotkin, Malatesta) resolved to put forward ideas that were generally socially applicable and imagined new, hopefully universal, social and political conditions as people took matters into their own hands and reformed society by such means (an anarchist form of communism), others created syndicalism and resolved to leverage the power of the working man. But yet others took to bombing, stealing and killing (or "illegalism" more generally) as the practical application of the view that "anarchy" annulled morality (or at least legality) too. Some

thought the right thing to do was form associations whilst others resolved to act alone in freedom and as their hearts desired. I don't think any of these ways succumb to a logic of right and wrong but I do think some were more of their time than others and that some were more useful beyond their immediate context than others. All could probably have agreed, however, that civilisation as it was actually unfolding was the oppressive and incarcerating problem. Not all, however, could have echoed this lament written by Bruno Filippi (and quoted by Landstreicher) in 1919:

"*I envy the savages. And I will cry to them in a loud voice: 'Save yourselves, civilization is coming.'*
Of course: our dear civilization of which we are so proud. We have abandoned the free and happy life of the forest for this horrendous moral and material slavery. And we are maniacs, neurasthenics, suicides.
Why should I care that civilization has given humanity wings to fly so that it can bomb cities, why should I care if I know every star in the sky or every river on earth? [...]
Today, the starry vault is a leaden veil that we vainly endeavor to pass through; today it is no longer unknown, it is distrusted.
[...] I don't give a damn for their progress; I want to live and enjoy."

Of course none of this is said to give the rejection of civilisation as it actually surrounds and engulfs us an anarchist heritage or authority. If we agree with the sentiments expressed who cares if anyone thought it before or if "names" echoed it previously? That we think it makes sense and has legs is and should always be enough. The issue, and the reason we have a desire to be "uncivilised", is "the way in which all of the various institutions that comprise civilization act together to take my life from me and turn it into a tool for social reproduction, and how they transform social life into a productive process

serving only to maintain the rulers and their social order" (as Landstreicher phrases this in a way that mostly echoes Guy Hocquenghem in an earlier chapter). This is not about "being reasonable". It is not about "coming to an accommodation with society". Becoming feral and uncivilised is not a negotiating point. It is an irrepressible ethical desire, a wild desire. It is to agree with Ernest Coeurderoy (although with some necessary mental gymnastics) that "In civilization, I vegetate; I am neither happy, nor free; why then should I desire this homicidal order to be conserved? There is no longer anything to conserve of that which the earth suffers." To immediately contradict Coeurderoy, however (for we have read the biologically focused chapter above), being like vegetation might actually be the point if "vegetating" be understood more fully and anarchically. For vegetation is probably freer than any of us are. And much less alienated from itself.

This is interesting when Aragorn Moser (once again) notes in his piece "Locating an Indigenous Anarchism" that "An indigenous anarchism is an anarchism of place." What does that mean? It means that civilisation has turned every place into a uniform and bland version of the same thing. Concrete, asphalt, bricks and mortar are laid across the land to make it all the same. The differentiations of place that occur in the natural world are built out, covered over, by civilisation so that a consistent, uniform experience of place can be established and maintained. Consequently, "Location is the differentiation that is crushed by the mortar of urbanization and pestle of mass culture into the paste of modern alienation." Civilisation does this, I imagine, without even thinking about it or imagining any consequence. But it is a material adjunct to Nietzsche's point in regard to language that it functions by bulldozing over differences in order to create useful generalities. For example, the word "leaf" designates all leaves. But all leaves are not the same. Not even all leaves of the same species are the same. Each is in some respects unique having its own unique life history as well. Yet civilisation comes along, not least in language and the

imposition of a classificatory imagination, and wipes away this level of material uniqueness for the sake of a world civilisation itself can exist in. Civilisation comes along materially, geographically, and places us in a place that essentially could be anywhere. But in the wild every place is and can only be itself. It is unique, And as it is unique, because it is unique, it can be uniquely known, experienced, related with, connected to.

Such alienation brings us back to technology which has a section all to itself in *Uncivilized*. That section begins with a quotation from a book which seems something of a guide for at least some of the Green Anarchists, Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society*. The quote used at the head of the "Technology" section of *Uncivilized* is as follows:

"*In the course of history there have always been different principles of civilization according to regions, nations, and continents. But today everything tends to align itself on technical principles. In the past, different civilizations took different 'paths'; today all peoples follow the same road and the same impulse. This does not mean that they have all reached the same point, but they are situated at different paths along the same trajectory. All the business of life, from work and amusement to love and death, is seen from the technical point of view. The number of 'technical slaves' is growing rapidly, and the ideal of all governments is to push as fast as possible toward industrialization and technical enslavement.*"

This, as we shall see, is a sentiment echoed in other pieces by other authors when they want to comment on technology. It is seen as a homogensing force, something which takes away uniqueness, individuality and particular character. It tends to make, and to treat, everything the same. More than this, however, it makes slaves and I can confirm this in my own commentary written from a present that was the far future to Ellul writing in

1954 and the near future to Green Anarchy in the early 2000s. They could not know exactly how corporations and governments would conspire to create a digital-social prison but, in their future with our present knowledge, we truly know better the shape of the technologically constructed cages built for us. Even so, Green Anarchy were not unaware of what was developing before our very eyes and how technology is not devices and machines but a coerced way of life that is coerced into being:

"*Our rulers can preserve their mechanized production-based System only by fundamentally changing who we are, by prodding us to become technology ourselves. This is exactly what we already are becoming within the infrastructure of the techno-industrial system: our existence entirely dependent, artificial, and parasitic; our behavior standardized to the internal logic of the machine and to the mechanisms that one needs for anything; our food without aroma or flavor; our ideas conformed to the flux of images and slogans that electronic communication constantly injects into us, feeding our mental universe—our own dreams becoming rancid rainbows. The technosphere, then, is not merely exploiting and wasting the natural and social milieus; it is fundamentally remaking the natural world and the human animal in technology's image.*"

"But technology is neutral," I hear you say. "Its how you use it." How quaint. How so totally inaccurate and short-sighted.

The technology pieces proper begin with Ran Priur's attempt to relativise science titled "Science: Civilization's Ally". This piece denies science's neutrality and denies that its desired "detached observation" is even possible. It poo poos the key scientific idea that matter is more fundamental than mind and follows this up with the idea that science's conception of matter is actually a cult of deadness. This mentality, because, for Priur,

science is a mentality rather than a reality, has at least in the past as our intellectual birthright, tended to be mechanistically imagined (i.e. through the metaphor of a machine. Clocks or watches have been popular examples). Thus, it is prey to technologically-funded imagination in a particularly and intellectually incestuous way. Note that none of this is anything to do with feeling or emotion or mind. Consequently:

"*Science makes everything dead not only by declaration, but by method. Science deals only with the quantitative. It does not admit values or emotions or the way the air smells when it's starting to rain or, if it deals with these things, it does so by transforming them into numbers, by turning your oneness with the smell of the rain into your abstract preoccupation with the chemical formula for ozone, by turning the way it makes you feel into the intellectual idea that emotions are only an illusion of firing neurons.*"

Perhaps the key statement of this piece is then that, "Number itself is not truth but a chosen style of thinking." This is ultimately Priur's point. Science is not the truth of the universe. It is (only) a way of thinking about and making use of our experience of it, a specifically human way. It can become very dangerous when it is turned into the quasi-religious phenomenon it has become, equated with divine truth itself. And let us not forget that every properly technological weapon ever fashioned was created, built and brought to market by scientists. The bombs that are being dropped right now in Iran as I write by Israeli and American planes are the results of science. The air pollution we breathe is the result of science. As are the warming acid seas and thousands of deaths worldwide from car accidents. Thank you, science. This was all your doing. Consequently, I agree with Priur's assertion that:

"*Science is only a manifestation and locking in of an urge for control that we've had at least since we started farming fields and fencing animals instead of surfing the less predictable (but more abundant) world of reality, or 'nature.' And from that time to now, this urge has driven every decision about what counts as 'progress.'*"

Please note here that "the wild" has never needed "science" to "progress" (or "evolve" as the scientists call it). It could manage that all by itself without it. And that is where Priur's assertion best does its work. Science is not about making anything better (it could only judge that perspectivally anyway). Its about controlling what happens at all. Its about the ever greater establishment of control, the interference in and manipulation of Earth.

So what we get is a world of number and measurement rendered artificially uniform, a mental imposition set over the natural diversity of experience. It is something the interestingly named Reverend Black Ahole picks up on in his "Sermon from the Cybermount". The good Reverend, using sarcasm to poke a stick in the ribs of our scientifically educated commentariat, asks "who would wish to visit such ghastly times when homo pre-symbolicus forsook their cognitive abilities and chose instead to constantly revel in the orgasmic pleasure of direct experience with a voluptuous earth?" Who indeed. Whoever said that everything must be reasonable now or even that Reason must be our only guide? Whoever said we had to get up according to what a manufactured clock said the time was or that every state of existence could and should be classified? One thing not picked up by the first two pieces on technology here is that Science becomes an authority. We must bow to both its Reason and its classificatory desires as if they were irrefutable but necessary authorities. Does this not take our autonomy and agency to simply be away? Nevertheless, Reverend Ahole seems to have been given some new commandments, "Lessons in Bookchinology" no less:

"*1. Thou shall have no other gods but Science, for this god is truly Omnipotent (virtual reality), Omniscient (artificial intelligence) and Omnipresent (electricity).*

2. Thou shall not kill, unless of course it is pygmy foragers or gorillas living on land containing coltan you need to mine in order to make cell phones.

3. Thou shall not steal, unless it is the joy one gets from non-sedentary life.

4. Thou shall honor and keep holy Descartes' birthday, for never must we think that historical icons are alienating or that specialists are unnecessary.

5. Thou shall not lie, unless it is done to convert a pre-homo symbolicus savage to the Church of Chemistry.

6. Thou shall not take Inter-Planetary Space Exploration's name in vain.

7. Thou shall not commit adultery with your neighbors scientifically designed android fuck toy.

8. Thou shall not covet thy neighbors widgets for all are welcome to delve into mediation as they please by unrelentingly visiting communal stores filled with the last techno-device.

9. Thou shall not autonomously make anything for cybernetic factory production is the sole source of survival and enjoyment.

10. Thou shall honor thy parents and schoolteachers for they are the key to each generation's adherence to Science."

Or, if that was all too much for you, take it in more concise form as delivered by a parody version of Noam Chomsky: "Thou shall slavishly obey Science by disconnecting yourself from non-symbolic ecstasy and pre-domesticated cornucopias." Presumably Noam did that himself whilst on planes with Jeffrey Epstein.

We see the recurrent themes of Green Anarchy's critique of technology again at the start of the piece "Towards Something New" which is "From the Italian Anti-Civilization Journal

Terra Selvaggia":

"*The long road of civilization, which has led to the present day technological-spectacular society, has been a constant process of separation from nature and of domestication of individuality. Now more than ever, this is evident in the capitalist desire to free commodity production from the earth and its resources, as well as in the city dweller afraid of losing her grip on society. It is evident in destructive processes, and in those tending toward the concentration of people into a homogenous mass. It is also evident in the alienation from our own bodies and in the entrusting of their cure to specialists accustomed to treating one body after another without valuing subjectivities at all, almost as if these bodies were machines.*

And this process has really operated mainly on this last aspect, not only separating us from external nature, but also from the form of nature, unacknowledged and mistreated by most, that we are. In this way, domination plants its roots in the brains of individuals convinced, or maybe constrained, to consider themselves other than nature."

The authors of this piece in fact find themselves in agreement with Ted Kaczynski:

"*F.C., the so-called Unabomber, observed in the manifesto, Industrial Society and Its Future: 'In the future, social systems will not be adjusted to suit the needs of human beings. Instead human beings will be adjusted to suit the needs of the system' (Thesis 151). With one small error, this future is already present. And it has always existed, even in less intrusive terms, with the adaptation and chaining of individuals, to economic development: work, the factory, degradation of food, commodification, spectacularization, etc.*"

A problem here for these authors is that technology, which they evaluate as an impoverishment of life itself, introduces the reality of mediation. We now experience life itself in and through such technological mediation which can bring great power for some over others. Since technology is a specialised subject that has inventors and owners and even investors, the power of its use and of the control it brings is not, and cannot be, equally distributed. Consequently, they say:

"*Before its too late, lets realize that science and technology are historical phenomena directed by a vulnerable elite and that our enslavement is in their interest. The key to the ascendancy of machines and of the post-human for an even more totalitarian domination lies in our acceptance; like it does for every form of exploitation and control. And it is only by overturning this notion and the current society, that it will be possible to find the key for the unknown world of freedom.*"

For Wolfi Landstreicher this then becomes a matter of "Technology and Class Struggle". But it is a matter in which old narratives born in the mid-nineteenth century are now out of date. Here it is not so much anymore a matter of controlling factory workforces as general social control:

"*new technological developments are not so much aimed at the manufacturing of goods as at the development of means for increasingly thorough and widespread social control and for freeing profit as much as possible from production…*

Because… technologies require specialized knowledge and are developed for the purpose of increasing the control of the masters over the rest of humanity even in our daily lives, the exploited class can now best be understood as those excluded from this specialized

knowledge and thus from real participation in the functioning of power. The master class is thus made up of those included in participation in the functioning of power and the real use of the specialized technological knowledge."

The interesting thing here is in fact exactly that modern technology is about controlling people at the population level. It is for this reason Landstreicher finds old dogmas of "expropriation" or "taking over the means of production" to be out of time. If technology only exists to control others – and if we do not in fact want to control others – then our seizing of it, even assuming we could, would be pointless except in the case that we simply wanted to destroy it and be free from it. It serves no other purpose but control. Consequently, it is not a matter of seizing anything to put it to our use but simply in order to escape the prison society:

"*the new technology and the new conditions of exclusion and precariousness it imposes on the exploited undermine the old dream of expropriation of the means of production. This technology—controlling and out of control–cannot serve any truly human purpose and has no place in the development of a world of individuals free to create their lives as they desire. So the illusory utopias of the Syndicalists and Marxists are of no use to us now. But were they ever? The new technological developments specifically center around control, but all industrial development has taken the necessity of controlling the exploited into account. The factory was created in order to bring producers under one roof to better regulate their activities; the production line mechanized this regulation; every new technological advance in the workings of the factory brought the time and motions of the worker further under control. Thus, the idea that workers could liberate themselves by taking over the means of production has always been a delusion. It was an understandable delusion when technological processes had the manufacture of goods as their primary aim. Now that their*

primary aim is so clearly social control, the nature of our real struggle should be clear: the destruction of all systems of control – thus of the state, capital and their technological system, the end of our proletarianized condition and the creation of ourselves as free individuals capable of determining how we will live ourselves."

In relation to technology I come finally to an interview with the film director and documentarian Godfrey Reggio most famous for "The Qatsi Trilogy" of films which begins with *Koyannisqatsi* and goes through *Powaqqatsi* to *Naqoyqatsi*. These are experimental movies, the first from 1982 and the last from 2002, which, in non-narrative, no plot and no talking form, present a kaleidoscope of imagery and music that become meditations on technology, humanity and the world, and particularly in relation to how the former affects the latter two. Such is the form of these films, however, that one, in fact, might not even know what the point of them was but for their titles. (Koyannisqatsi, for example, means "life out of balance" in the Hopi language from which all the titles are taken. Powaqqatsi can be rendered somewhat literally as "life sorcerer" whilst Naqoyqatsi means "life of war" or "civilised violence".) The point here is that the films are made as in some sense reflections upon the effect technology has upon life on earth in different arenas. The first focuses on the Northern Hemisphere or First World, the second focuses on the geographical south that is (broadly speaking) the less developed world and the third and final film focuses on the digital world. The idea seemingly driving these films ideologically is that technology is a form of life of its own that must conform other life to itself. The implicit question in this is then what this is doing to us and our organic surroundings and if this is good, bad, desired or desirable, etc.

Reggio himself takes up a definitive position on such questions and is influenced by people such as Jacques Ellul who regarded technology as "the new and comprehensive

host of life, the new environment of life". This is at least to concede that technology is a pertinent issue in terms of a form of life itself. Ellul, as with Reggio after him, was critical of this fact and bore a lot of criticism as a result since people in general are befuddled and consumed by the myth of technology as progress. We might characterise Reggio's views by aligning him with the Catholic philosopher and social critic Ivan Illich's view that "Freedom is the ability to say 'no' to technological necessity", a statement Reggio himself quotes in his interview in *Uncivilized*. Consequently, Reggio says that he uses technology in order to undermine technology as an idea and as a means or form of life. This aspect of technology as not things or machines but expressly as "a form of life" is brought out well when Reggio says in response to a question about why he began to make the Qatsi films that:

"*the single most important thing a person can do is to begin to rename the world in which they live... because when you name something, you in effect create it. My own thought is that our language is bound with antique ideas, old formulas that no longer describe the moment in which we are. Therefore, that statement, 'A picture is worth a thousand words', I tried to take it and turn it on its head, and tried to give you a thousand pictures that can offer the power of one word. In the case of each of the three films, Koyaanisqatsi, Powaqqatsi, Naqoyqatsi, words that come from an illiterate source, a primal source, a wisdom that is beyond our ability to describe the world. A wisdom that says that all things we call normal are abnormal, all things that we call sane are insane.*"

The sense here of course is then that technology has its own wisdom, its own logic, and it is not saying what a world in the absence of such technology would say. These are alternate wisdoms, alternate logics. It is also worth pointing out as a part of this that Reggio is not at all asking about CONTROL of technology (who has the power to make use

of the power) as if the presence of technology was either to be assumed or had somehow been made compulsory. Here it is worth quoting what he has to say in more detail:

"*My question is not who controls the means of production, but the nature of production, as such. The question is not whether or not workers have an equitable pay and a healthy work environment, which is the interest of organized labor, or the Left that works with organized labor. The question, more profoundly, is, what is the effect of the automobile on society and should we have that in the first place? So, we're dealing more with fundamental questions. It has become my experience, sadly, that human beings become their environment. We become what we see, what we hear, what we taste, what we touch. Anything that we do without question, in an altered state, we become that environment. If the environment that we live in today, as Ellul says, is a technological milieu or environment, if we no longer live with nature, and I'm not parenthetically talking about going back to teepees and caves etc, if our environment itself is technological, if we don't use technology, if we live it, breathe it like the air that is ubiquitous around us, then we become that environment. In that sense, whether you're communist, capitalist, socialist, primitive, an outsider, an artist, a revolutionary, if you live in this world, all of us doing that, we become this world. In that sense, all of us now are cyborged. Cyborg is not something for the future, it is already here. We live now in both worlds. The old world, the world that 'nature' replaced, old nature, held its unity through the mystery of diversity. So there are many languages, many different environments to live in, there's tropical, there's semi-tropical, there's mountain, there's desert, there's savannah, there's salva, etc. There's not one flower, there's uncountable flowers. Not one animal, a zillion of them, not one human being, many. The mantra of the old world was, Divided we stand. The new world, the technological order, holds its unity through a technological imperative. It creates unity through technological homogenization. Its mantra is United we stand. To me, this is the moment we're in. We're at that crossroads*

and the world is becoming homogenized; what we're seeing is the Los Angelization of the planet through technology. My work has been, in effect, to try to shield my eyes from the blinding light of the new sun, technology, seeking the darkness, walking towards the positive value of negation. Trying to question the very structures, the very contexts in which we live, not who controls them."

"Human beings become their environment" is a very powerful statement that certainly resonates with me. When you add in Reggio's distinction between a wild that stands on, in and through its diversity and a technological construct that exists in, by and through homogenization this magnifies that statement tenfold. You begin to realise just how different a wild world and our technological one would be. Largely that is a matter of the diversity, difference and simple uniquenesses – and the geographical locality – that a wild world produces but which a technological world must erase:

"*as the earth is being eaten up by the voracious appetite of technology, everything that is local is disappearing. In that disappearance, language disappears and when language disappears, we are left with a more homogenized language to describe the world which, again, does not give us access to understanding. It produces more conformity.*"

There is, of course, an obvious Orwellian application to those words (which are echoed elsewhere by anthropologist James C. Scott) from Reggio for in *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* The Party want to create Newspeak which operates by constricting vocabulary, disappearing words and gradually making forms of thought literally inexpressible and so unthinkable. Of course, The Party require to have absolute totalitarian control of their society. Reggio's argument is only a material, environmental application of this same thought in an argument that this is technology's pernicious effect. His argument, however, is quite

subtle and makes the point that it is “the normal” and “the familiar” that becomes our enemy. The enemy is absolutely in plain sight. So when asked about the message of his films he replies:

“*I was trying to show that that very thing that we call familiar is itself a techno-fascistic way of living. So I tried to see it from another point of view, I tried to see it as a life-form, albeit a non-organic life-form, that has a life absolutely independent of our own. Right now, the cities are made for the automobile, not for the people. When the automobile was brought in as a technology, they said it would just be a ‘faster horse,’ it wouldn’t have any more effect than that. But we all know that’s ridiculous, we all know that we pay a hidden price for our pursuit of technological happiness and we call it, instead of war, we call it accident. But more people die in vehicular crashes than they do in war, if that’s even believable. So, it’s just the price we’re willing to pay for the pursuit of our technological happiness, and these films are about questioning that point of view.*”

Here the title of Reggio’s second film from 1988, *Powaqqatsi*, is important for besides having a literal meaning of “life sorcerer”, Reggio interprets it to mean “a way of life that consumes the life forces of other beings in order to further its own life.” This clearly seems to be something, in some sense, parasitic upon organic life. All technology (at least so far!) requires us to enable it – for we could simply turn the power off. And yet so insidious is it (perhaps in an echo of Reggio’s idea that we have all been cyborged now) that it co-opts us into its way of life and makes us come to rely on it, be unable to imagine life without it, changes us so that we feel pain or loss in living without it. The fascist connotations of this, both as an idea and as a material reality in human use and application of technology as control, are surely obvious. Consequently, speaking about his

films which switch from First to Developing World focuses in the course of the trilogy, Reggio can say:

"*The standard of living of the world is based on first world norms, of consumption, of the institutionalization of life, of giving up your own control to the control of others. The very opposite is true in the so-called third world or Southern hemisphere, where really, the heritage of the earth exists not only in nature but in human development. Small, convivial, decentralized societies of handmade living, where things can be uniquely different, valley to valley, plain to plain. The world that we're trying to force, through the IMF, etc., on the southern hemisphere, is a world of homogenized value. A world where Los Angeles, Jakarta, Hong Kong, the Philippines, etc., all look the same. This is in diametric opposition to the nature of the development of the South, which is disappearing right now because of the norms of development. The very founding, for example, of the United Nations, was on the dogma, on the theology, on the philosophy, of promoting progress and development around the world as our guarantee for world peace. Now what crazier thought could you have? All of us buy in, in some way. Many people buy into the United Nations, but their very purpose is to produce this homogenizing event all over the world. For me this is the essence of techno-fascism, and it's another example of how the Northern hemisphere is consuming, without question, the Southern hemisphere. The Northern hemisphere has consumed most of its own resources already, the Southern hemisphere is where the nature bank of our world still exists. If the north has its way, that will be consumed to create and further develop the technological order, which for me, is a fascistic venture.*"

Reggio emphasises in and through his words the very importance of the fact and materiality of local autonomy, an autonomy technology is often deployed to frustrate or even destroy. Reggio finds ANY universal imposition to be "fascistic" and inasmuch as he

does that he praises autonomy as a quality, ability and characteristic of a detechnologised and wild world itself. To this extent, Reggio speaks to a new drive towards creativity which functionally becomes the promotion of that wild diversity technology seeks to end. And so he says:

"*I think our greatest opportunity is to live a creative life. Often that means to reject schooling, rejecting organized education. For many of us, our diploma from college becomes our death certificate, because it ingratiates us into a way of life that's unquestioned where the principal modus operandi is finance, or money. The real meaning of life, I think for all of us, in our different ways, is the opportunity to live a creative life, to create things, to name things. I would say for all of us, the most radical thing we can do, and the most practical thing we can do, is to be idealistic, to rename the world in which we live. I think we do that best through example, not just through using words, but using words that we can stand on, the acts that we do. Living in the world but not being of the world, being an outsider, yet knowing that all of us are insiders. Living with the conundrum that life is not this or that, life is this and that. It's not black or white, it's black and white. So I'll add to that whole recipe humor, and one has the possibility of living a meaningful life.*"

All this, if you like, is but several complimentary analyses of the problem, the realisation that what has come to be capitalist civilisation is an act of murder-suicide against and upon the Earth. But the issue is not only, or merely, recognition of the problem as a problem but our attempts, the attempts of life that is oppressed, to fight back against the forces that seek to control and curtail it, to exploit it, to even wipe it out as illegitimate or habitually disobedient. We have to discuss resistance. We have to discuss how self-organising life reasserts itself and escapes the many forms of prison civilisation – and technology and social control and colonisation – that try to coerce us.

But first: what is our goal here? Its a serious question and its one which, if you get the answer wrong, will lead you off on flights of useless fancy and pointless wastes of time. I take the view: keep it simple. Get to the heart of what wildness and the wild is all about. Our only desire here can be TO LIVE OUR LIVES ON OUR OWN TERMS. If we do this it will quite naturally diverge from the way civilisation wants us to live. If we do this it will automatically involve us in taking responsibility for ourselves. Wolfi Landstreicher takes up and runs with this desire in the piece "Play Fiercely" where he pairs it with "destroying the ruling order". That order, by the way, is obviously not passive. If you "live on your own terms" too much that forced order is sure to come looking for you or you are sure to crash into one of its myriad road blocks (many of which have familiar faces). So its destruction and complete subversion is very much in your interest. Landstreicher himself attaches four activities to such desire:

1. Direct action (acting yourself toward your desires rather than delegating)
2. Autonomy (you are in charge of you; there can be no organisational decision-making)
3. Permanent conflict (i.e. get used to life being a fight)
4. Attack (no coming to terms, mediation, becoming pacifist, etc. You are trying to win)

Landstreicher calls such activities "the immediate desire of anarchist revolutionary practice." That aside, however, there is no easy advice to give you. There is no one person you can kill, building you can blow up or button you can press which makes civilisation go away or give up or pack up its things and go home. Civilisation's desire to completely encompass and contain everything you do is absolute and only its complete disablement or destruction can end that. Having got into the trap, getting out is a much more difficult prospect and it will take a lifetime's work and effort – with zero guarantee of success – to begin living lives that are the self-determined ones we want to lead. One might argue,

and I in fact do argue, that anarchy is consequently an activity of life, *the* activity of life. Its about equipping yourself, finding allies, working together, never giving in, refusing the coercions of the world. So I can well understand why some anonymous author has written in the piece "Youth Liberation: Burn the Schools and Destroy the Media!":

"*anarchists should start right now building up publicly accessible libraries, free school seminars, and personal repertoires of socio-political theory, historical knowledge, and more important by far, real hands-on skills of all kinds: from creating art and music to building and fixing your own cars, bombs, and bicycles; from permaculture to wild food gathering and hunting; from marksmanship to conflict resolution. I mean, don't we want to learn how to really live and share that with the next generation?*"

What this tells us is that "resistance" is not being the next social media meme because you shot a CEO – an action that made the merest of dints in civilisation's thick armour – but about the business of actually constructing alternate forms of life – social, political, material and intellectual. Such anarchists, after the Situationists who first uttered such slogans, do not only "demand the impossible", they choose to try and live out the impossible. Which is to say they live it out whole-heartedly and authentically for as long as they can. The time is now and you are either going to get to doing shit or you aren't. And its not as if you don't have much to do because if you were born in civilisation then it literally made you, gave you everything you have and told you who you are and where you fit in. But now, as a creature of the wild, you have to figure all that out again FOR YOURSELF. AND THEN FOLLOW THROUGH ON IT! Therefore:

"*informed people should not forget that a few main institutions are primarily responsible for molding human beings into citizens, consumers and capitalists—namely: mass corporate*

media, the nuclear family, and the compulsory education system. Finding ways to attack and transcend these evil influences is essential to moving beyond civilization."

We need to remember that here in technological civilisation our lives have been almost completely conditioned and moulded by family, school and corporate media (we are domesticated). None of those sources are letting you decide what you want to hear or giving you a say on where to go next. What they do is present you with a world and set you in it as one who is meant to get along on ITS terms and not YOURS. That includes giving you its sense of right and wrong when you should more properly be deciding that for yourself but also continually bombarding you with messaging in order to police both your existence and what few choices it allows you to have. One could, without much hyperbole, describe it as a constant psychological warfare – especially in terms of corporate media. This is not least because, if we are going to think ourselves out of civilisation and technology then we have to break free of the coercive media which will only immerse us in the need for civilisation and technology. We will have to come to think something like Ran Priur in "Thinking through the Fall" that:

"*electricity and hot tap water are not necessities that elevate us from humiliating poverty, but minor luxuries, even fads; where living well doesn't mean insulating yourself from everything you can't predict or control, but having honest friends and a day to day life that's meaningful.*"

There are people in this world, hundreds of millions of them, who live outside electricity grids and hot water systems. They might not have a Playstation or be able to watch sports on TV but does that make their lives worse? Is life even about such luxuries and technological conveniences and entertainments?

Now, what do we desire again? Felonius Skunk sends us a warning in “Contributing to Momentum against Civilization”:

“*there is a slippery and unfortunate tendency to repeat a motivational and organizational mistake of previous anarchists or revolutionaries; that is, the goal of constructing (whether egalitarian or not) a new social movement. It is baffling that those who have a strong critique of the Left (including an analysis of the fetishization of organization, representation, standardization, leadership, and mass society) can also stumble into the same pitfalls of trying to ‘build a movement’.*”

I like Skunk’s brief article because it seems to understand the need for a wild imperative in contradiction to civilisation. It is not about running civilisation better but about being fundamental in opposition to it and not living in any respect according to its ways or construction of relations. Consequently, Skunk talks about “a diverse momentum against civilization” and “creating ways to truly live outside of [civilization’s] logic.” In this there is no reason that everyone must follow the same way. THAT THERE IS DIVERSITY MATTERS. Diversity is in fact a vital aspect of the attack on a civilisation which destroys diversity with its every advance. REAL diversity is actually a real attack against civilisation. Consequently, Skunk says:

“*I have no interest in creating a “new’ and ‘improved’ paradigm, but in dispelling with the very notion. I seek to contribute to a diverse momentum against civilization without ideological limitations, moral constraints, or entrenched expectations; through rewilding and healing from the wounds inflicted upon us by civilization with those with whom I have deep affinity and desire for intimacy, while creating healthy living dynamics and projects with these people; putting out questions and my personal analysis of civilization, and*

resistance to it, for people to do with what they want; learning from and sharing experiences and ideas, and, when possible, supporting others who are unleashing their fury on civilization and moving outside of its confines; and attacking the symbolic and physical manifestations of civilization where I feel I can, and where I determine the strategic targets to be, and where they directly affect my life."

"Where they directly affect my life" is an important detail there and it links directly with the piece by "the grievous amalgam" titled "lights camera action" which is about the proliferation of CCTV cameras we have in urban society these days. In fact, this piece is about "destroying video surveillance cameras as an act of rewilding". Ironically enough (for me at least) this American authored piece mentions the UK as the testbed for constant civil surveillance and it was noticeable living here how these cameras became common place at the turn of the 21st century whether as simple eyes watching everything that happened or in order to monitor behaviour (such as which drivers went where so they could be charged for the privilege). British arms of government certainly embraced video surveillance of public space with gusto and any British city now is a criss-cross web of cameras intruding on the lives of others. The Grievous Amalgam remind us that such cameras exist "with the aim of increasing obedient uniformity and snuffing out wildness on an international scale" but the authors are, of course, way behind the times now in a world where our own electronic devices are betraying us as a matter of design and reporting all our actions to corporate and government snoopers alike (often being to one on behalf of the other). As are many people's doorbells or their vehicles or their eyewear. Tech corps have in the last twenty years decided to put cameras in as many things as they can – always with the right to keep the footage and pass it to the authorities if requested to. In this civilisation, more and more tech exists to track, record and surveil EVERYTHING. And these authors know why:

"*The global system is striving to eclipse all contestable sites of physical space and shape all interpersonal relations through the establishment of a totalizing spatial enclosure. This is the process whereby the explicit duplication of a characteristically capitalist mode of production reprograms and utterly restructures the behaviors, life rhythms, cultural habits and temporal sense of its subjects. Nanotechnology, genetic engineering, and CCTV are all integral to the project of taming wildness and pounding it down into the coin of mercantile civilization.*"

But it is worse even than this for what we are talking about here – quite literally – is "technologies of domination" in a civilised war of the civilisational powers against the civilisationally incarcerated in "the cage-like conditions of technoindustrial civilisation":

"*CCTV exists to create a sterile, whitewashed world in which spontaneity disappears, our behavior is fully law-abiding and humanity eventually sleeps itself to death… Any serious attempt to analyze and break down the locked doors that enclose our lives in the modern world will inevitably lead to the observation that society itself has become a vast prison, a monumental gulag of the body, mind and senses. Thus it's hardly surprising that many social theorists since Orwell have discussed the character of modern Western civilization using prison imagery.*"

Its certainly not surprising to me since such language came to me easily when I began to work on my own projects. Whether you take Orwell or Bentham's Panopticon as your guide, its very true to say that "The gaze of someone in an authoritative position is a power/knowledge mechanism, which contains and imprisons those subjects who come under its scrutiny." Its all part of a plan to "construct a 'Total Institution' of permanently entrenched fear" which capitalists like Larry Ellison, the boss of Oracle who has both the

ear of Trump and regularly donates to malign influences like the Tony Blair Institute, are happy to even mention in public without any subterfuge. And so:

"*The exploited, the undesirables, the "bad consumers,' the natural world, the wild—we are all to be reduced to high-resolution captivity superimposed on us by video surveillance, and autonomy and feralness are to be faded out cinematically.*"

The wild, by very definition, is not a place that is, or should be, watched over, surveilled, policed. So a CCTV network, or any tracking network at all, is a direct and unsubtle attack upon it as both an idea and as a material reality. We are induced by the very trinkets the corporations advertise at us and push into our hands as necessary conveniences to collaborate in our own digital, but also very material, imprisonment:

"*The cameras of the State seek to produce a new type of civilized slave, one that is satisfied in its restricted possibilities, isolation and anomie, dreaming the circumscribed dreams of the powerless and unimaginative, never crossing the paltry bounds that the system provides. With no aspirations that go beyond what exists in their plastic tombs, the exploited become like wild animals whose teeth and claws have been removed.*"

Do we need reminding that: "humans are not simply robots or 'docile bodies' following the dictates of coercive micro-mechanisms of state power, but potentially feral, ungovernable agents capable of interpreting, rejecting and destroying these structures"? I hope not. And yet:

"*While some people conceive of 'rewilding' as scattering marijuana seeds in the cracks around City Hall or learning the Latin names of 'native' plant species, we recognize that any*

serious rewilding will also necessarily involve the destruction of the technological system. The total administration of life is underway and to fight it we need to move from arresting paralysis to the deployment of regenerative chaos, by smashing the rational and institutional restraints placed on our lives and rekindling the Promethean fires of the imagination. The struggle to reclaim wildness is intrinsically a confrontation between chaos and organization: whether we accept it unquestioningly or rebel against it, technology has acquired not simply a life of its own, but a life that substantially infiltrates our lives, warping our characters as we gradually accept its mechanistic parameters.

If we succumb indifferently to the totalitarian re-engineering of our world, we risk becoming androids ourselves, animals made into machines. To deny technology's pervasive role in our existence means, then, to deny reality—at a time when the prospects for life and liberty seem to be rapidly drying up, and we are advancingly imbricated in the Panopticon's presence. Only by demolishing the System's machinery itself can we hope to get out from under the thumb of the political order and achieve our vision of renewal. Technology and the State are two of the more obvious enemies of wildness. Destroy what destroys you!"

One of the most interesting things about all of this is that we come to be talking about colonisation. Colonisation is not just what some white Europeans did to some non-white indigenous folks from other lands. It is first and foremost what this civilisation did to its own inhabitants and participants as a means of its own continuance. Before European civilisation could colonise anywhere else it had to form and maintain itself, become a certain sort of entity. This should inform us that any colonisation is, first of all, an intellectual and a material process; it is about creating a population with a certain understanding of itself that is given substance by the implantation of certain values but also the creation of a structure of material relations. That is to say that the imaginal and

material worlds must mesh together in such a way that no one would question their naturalness and normality. They should appear as just the way things are. It is only when you meet the uncolonised that you then realise people can think, act and be related differently. And then you get to colonisation as more regularly understood as described here by Green Anarchy in their section on the need for decolonisation:

"*The fundamental strategy of colonization is actually quite simple: if you intend to destroy an individual or group, first destroy their dreams, their languages, and their habitat. From there, it's a process of instilling in the colonized people a veneration for all that civilization has created and represents, and cultivating in their minds a psychology of dependence and submissiveness: just shape their thoughts in the brutal mould of civilization, until the majority of the colonized subjects can no longer think in terms of freedom any more than a bee can think in terms of poetry or mathematics. And it's this slave instinct, crystallized in our natures over the course of thousands of years, which petrifies us and deadens our responses to the totalistic nightmare we are faced with. The domestication of our species has been occurring for a long time, and the failure of 'working class' revolutions makes a lot more sense when we consider the stern slave instincts that have been carved into their fibre by ten thousand colonized generations, to whose iron mandates they bend as unconsciously as they do to the demands of their belly.*"

Colonisation, then, is the attempt of an acquisitive, conquering, coercive civilisation to take away every freedom, every difference, every aspect of agency in diversity you thought you had and to conform you entirely to a material and imaginal template of its own invention. Such a civilisation is quite happy to destroy anything, or anyone, that won't comply. In fact, it must. For it is them or us in the mind of such a civilisation. Consequently, its values and its material relations are not negotiable and must be forced

onto people and enforced thereafter. Green Anarchy were then right: IT WANTS SLAVES. It wants people who can't think in any other way but as slaves. It wants you to betray your own freedom and eventually not even realise that's what you are doing. So, as many of the writers in Green Anarchy point out on this subject, there can be no agreement or peace treaty with such a mentality, a mentality which has set out to make war on you. If it is us or them well then its going to have to be us. But this sets up an interesting difference, one that sets the colonials apart from the indigenous. Of course, before civilisation we were all indigenous. The writer Homer Bust points this out in the first piece of the decolonisation section of *Uncivilized*:

"*We once lived unmediated from the earth, ate directly from the forest, drank straight from its waters, slept touching the ground, healed ourselves with its plants, made all of our decisions concerning our lives with people we loved. We are still these people, only scarred, with cold and clunky armor created for us by a culture of death that we have reluctantly accepted when and where we have grown too tired and weak. We have been tamed. We have been domesticated. But, we are still connected under this baggage, this defensiveness, this disposition.*"

This should wake us up and at least plant the seeds of realisation – as it does here in fact:

"*I know in my heart and in my bones that we can live differently, that we have lived differently, and that those possibilities can come together in beautiful ways. I have no expectations within this nightmare; my/our only hope is to wake up from the confusion. There is no future in this failed experiment; all I can do is reject it. There is no possibility of readjustment; it can only be destroyed. I must find a place, people, and a way to live differently; to reconnect and to dream.*"

The first step is always realisation: WE DO NOT HAVE TO LIVE LIKE THIS. My experience is when you have that realisation, when you realise the world outside the bars of civilisation is wild and free, you realise you have all these freedoms you never even realised you had. (I can go back to my perennial reference *V for Vendetta* here for lots more on this.) You can do things JUST BECAUSE YOU WANT TO. You can say NO. You can make judgements FOR YOURSELF. You become what Sky Hiatt calls in another piece "Strangers Touching the Void":

"*You are born. The faces watching you will be known to you throughout your life. They will tend to you, dress you, feed you, teach you. They will love you. You will grow up playing under the same trees they played under before you and their parents before them. You will sing the songs they sing. You will dance the ritual dances passed down through time. You will sing and dance in unison with your tribe. You will learn the traditions, the codes, the rhythms, the customs and the mysteries of your kind and you will pass them on to your own in time. You will eat the common foods and follow the fashion that follows climate that follows the land that surrounds you. You will call the Earth home. You will build lodges by your own hand. You will never doubt the meaning of being alive. Everything around you will reflect you and will be anchored in the cultural mind. Your life and your ideas will be valued. Shared myths and legends will intensify the bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood. You will never wonder what to do, what to be. The resonance of your way of life will ratify the social memory and you will be free.*

But all that was before. Things are different now. Today, infants are born into the anonymous hands of people they may never see again. They are swaddled and laid in rows in bassinets, Baby Smith, Baby Lee. Their first labels. Their indoctrination begins at the beginning. The cries, the sounds, the faces, all this will fade, and be lost to them. They will

move on to daycare, pre-school, first grade, second grade. The continual rotation of teachers, schoolmates, even the rooms and buildings they study in, inure the young to the perverse influences of social impersonality. By the age of 12 most children cede in utter unquestioning concession to the unbearable weight of being. They are already experts at suppressing the primitive senses. They are the ghost in the shell of Mamoru Oshii's dystopic human being. Strangers stream past them, the faceless white noise of modernity. Today's children are born into the void…

How did these two populations, that of the past, and that of the present, come to be so different? What happened to that other world? History covets such revelations. Today we know that few abandon such a life willingly. Things were done. But what was done, at the time, wasn't even a crime. To the contrary, it was heroic. It was messianic. Because when Christopher Columbus and his crew regarded the naked naturalist populations of the new world, the first mission was wealth and power, the second was to crush out everything unfamiliar, everything not like them. And they succeeded so well in these goals, they fixed for all time the landmark and by now almost Sabbath notion of the justness of colonialism. Their achievements have survived the trials of time and they are immortalized. They opened the conquered lands to the architecture of industrialization, the genius of the germ theory, advanced weaponry, fashion, and an otherwise almost imponderable body of knowledge festered into existence in the plague-ridden hubs of Europe. Along with the barbarism of soulless greed, the intrepid adventurers of the age of exploration brought with them the bounties of technical and scientific ingenuity and the fortitude of spirit necessary to impose these towering gifts on a naked people who had nothing.

Modern multiculturalists, after having cleared aside the atrocities of history so as to view the pure core of the blessings colonialism conferred upon the world, ruminate and

apologetically sanctify the assault. The primitive people were lost, Columbus found them. For this he has been historically indemnified. He sailed under the flags of commerce and entrepreneurial consciousness became the condescending hallmark of our times. He changed our world, rewrote future history and generated an alternate future world-view. He and the other adventurers crisscrossed the globe victoriously destabilizing cultures, unable to detect the subtle shifting in the well of social souls their victories authorized for the generations. They were on a proud mission of inevitability and there was probably no way they could have known what they were doing or understood why their distant descendants would politely shun each other and live implausibly humbled and cautious all the time. The dazzling colossus of cultural decay set into motion by colonialism, exploration and global commerce weakened the laws of social attraction and tempted the human world into severance and decay. Their pursuit of adventure, privilege, and prosperity, has devastated culture upon culture and erased thousands of years of tribal knowledge and social continuity from the Earth and replaced it with shopping plazas and urban landscapes as sterile to human cultural well being as the vacuums of outer space. As we now know, the mission the conquerors set out on was a mission of human estrangements…

Are we prisoners of war? Are we slaves? If not, where are our people?

'Hello, My name is Bob.' At least that's what the name tag says. It also says, 'I am a victim of psycho-social dismemberment. I don't know you and I probably never will.' The label implies a precondition of impermanence and superficiality and a lack of interest in you, whoever you are. It proclaims a temporary dissolution of the process of formative acquaintanceships. It's a signal—you will not be expected to remember anything they say, or care. Labels bypass the old standards and substitute new methods based on the ebbing enthusiasms and the incremental erosions of modern social life. We don't object. Best not to ask more than

society cares to give. We are comfortable not knowing who these people are. The label guards the outposts of social isolation.

It's a new and unusual social category—people we don't know and may never meet again, meaningful only in the aggregate. The doors are opened. Seats must be filled. It doesn't matter by whom. Just interchangeable biologic units relieved of the burdens of familiarity."

With this text Sky Hiatt elucidates for us a major difference between the indigenous and the civilised (at least as European civilisation has manifested the latter in any case). That difference is between the known, the intimate, the familiar of indigeneity and the ESTRANGEMENT upon which civilisation relies. This civilisation sets out to make us strangers on purpose. We must not care (too much) about each other or about place (locality). We have to occasionally huddle or work together as those unknown, separate, divided, those who go home to flats and houses where we live alone in our own space which, most importantly, is no one else's space – and certainly not communal space, public space, social space. We are not one people, not a community – AND WE MUST NEVER BE (at least not unless its rallying behind some vacuous national flag or some drummed up cause that will benefit someone who is not us and to which we have to be coerced). Civilisation is marked by two primary estrangements: the first is from each other and the second is from an intimacy and locality of place. In place of these things civilisation substitutes the arbitrary organisation (from above) of strangers and the arbitrary designation (and assimilation, homogenisation) of places. So as Hiatt adds: "A society of mandatory strangers is the power that keeps modernity going. A collective would rise up and shut it down. To allow civilization to continue, we simply cannot know each other too well."

Now the thing is togetherness helps you survive (as not only Kropotkin realised in writing *Mutual Aid*). So Hiatt adds here:

"*Anthropologists have theorized that for human cultures to endure, it would be best not to let cognitive trust populations dip too low. Estimates vary. To hold on to enough functional information, it's important the members of the trust remain well acquainted and stable geographically. The indigenous Tasmanians are the champions here. They lived in small groups isolated from contact with other cultures for 12,000 years before being discovered by the British and wiped out. They survived in their wild world with a compliment of only 24 cultural artifacts, giving them the title of the most 'primitive' people alive in recent times. Will we ever be so clever? The comprehensive hive-mind they shared allowed the Tasmanians to survive… But, we are modern. So we are at a disadvantage. Modernity makes us stupid. Not by killing brain cells, although it surely does, but by displacing us from the land and destabilizing the cognitive trust.*"

What is being talked about here is the necessity for a sociality, a genuine communality, a free and authentic communality, that is not as one because it is forced to be but because it comes together absolutely without coercion to do so. Think ant colonies or bee hives if you want a natural reference point. No authority makes all those insects bind together and act in unison but doing so they form a powerful collective, a society – without coercion. That is what Hiatt means in human context by "cognitive trust populations". This is how the wild facilitates social survival – by means of tightly knit but always uncoerced social existence. And civilisation works completely at odds to it. It in fact looks to deliberately destroy it because it thinks it knows best and it is a danger to its own arbitrary coercion. So it must estrange us and reward estrangement whilst punishing true and uncoerced collectivity (as it once did with Golden Age pirates). Here "Scavenger"

makes a point in their piece “Seeds on the Breeze” that “The inherent dishonesty that underlies all relationships and interactions within the context of civilization is a huge barrier to overcome” whilst simultaneously reminding us that “We are not a movement and we have no need for indoctrinated ‘recruits’; we are part of a wild and natural backlash of feral resistance.”

Here we are talking about something of the indigenous both as skills and as an uncoerced sociality as an aspect of the rewilding of ourselves:

“*The physical aspects of rewilding are in many ways essential to creating the foundation for an honest relationship with the human and non-human beings we encounter in our lives. Earth skills and primitive knowledge create a solid base that allows us to know, not just think, but truly know that we don’t need civilization. When I know that I can enter the forest or the desert and find food, make fire, locate water and communicate with whoever I find there, I have reduced the physical necessity in my life for the artifice of civilization. As mentioned before, the artifice that surrounds us reflects us and shapes our lives in very literal ways.*”

In fact, it makes us the disabled people we are today and it does this on purpose. People who could look after themselves and form mutually beneficial societies without civilisation would not have any incentive to comply with its dictates (which is just one reason why if you try this within reach of civilisation it will expend resources trying to flatten you). Consequently, “Honest rewilding is not only about breaking old patterns and addictions but just as importantly it is about fulfilling deeper needs. Rewilding is a path to learning self-sufficiency, living with meaning—finding joy and contentment with each day, seeking adventure and real entertainment. Connectivity with self, land and others …” This

can all be argued to be more obviously indigenous than civilisational and can be summed up as “The urge to live spontaneously and act on deep desires.” As a result, rewilding is:

“*unplugging from within, breaking chains of perception, restraint, obedience and compliance. It is physical also—unmaking addictions, not just staving them off but finding their roots and pulling them all the way out of the self, unraveling the shroud of fear that is wrapped tight around us even before we are born. It is about becoming what we were born to be; it’s about becoming human in the way we choose and acting as we will, not simply as we can.*”

A.R.Son adds in his piece “We are Not Separate”:

“*My struggle for liberation will be fought on three fronts: my mind, my body, and this Earth —all currently colonized (that is to say, occupied) by the sickness we call civilization. All three fronts must be fought at once—colonialism cannot be divided up and asked to wait until it is convenient for me to fight. Colonialism is everywhere. Colonialism is relentless. Colonialism is the totality. Thus if I am serious about liberation I must struggle constantly, everyday to decolonize my mind, my body, and the land I am standing on. I must be prepared to live life as war.*”

That our surroundings matter, that they affect us and that context makes a difference, is really the key point to take from Scavenger’s further piece “Reclaiming the Myth-Time” where “how you receive the story is how we relate as beings. How we communicate is how we connect, or fail to connect.” Scavenger discerns a vast difference in context of life here between our ancestors who had spontaneity and who we became who are said to

favour “security” instead – at the cost of any spontaneity (otherwise known as freedom, agency, autonomy) at all. But as Scavenger then adds:

“*The human mind learns by absorbing the experience of its surroundings. Just as sun and clouds, rocks and rivers and trees will shape a mind differently than plastic, metal and boxy indoor spaces, so too will creative and inspired stories that manifest Wonder shape a mind and society differently than boring claims of objectively discovered truth.*”

This all leads me to someone who at least claims an indigenous voice, that of Ward Churchill, a person of indeterminate racial heritage (he has claimed ancestors from various Indian tribes in the past though never very directly) who has written multiple works about the colonial oppression of First Peoples on land now called “American” in the USA and who claims to speak as an “indigenist”. (“I am one who not only takes the rights of indigenous peoples as the highest priority of my political life, but who draws upon the traditions—the bodies of knowledge and corresponding codes of value—evolved over many thousands of years by native peoples the world over.”) It is this which interests me here and particularly his essay “I Am Indigenist” which I am going to interact with now in detail.

To be indigenist is to have a set of values and beliefs. One could call it an ethic. It does not make one indigenous nor does it require anyone to identify as such. For Ward Churchill “It is a complex of ideas, sentiments, and understandings which motivate the whole of the American Indian Movement, broadly defined, here in North America.” Now one should know very well that the indigenous peoples of what is now called the USA (as with pretty much all other countries of the Americas generally) were treated very badly by European colonisers whether English/British, Spanish, French, German, Portuguese or Dutch. Many

were slaughtered. Others were enslaved. There was much violence. What was theirs was simply taken due to the European belief they were superior people (who, not coincidentally, also largely believed in the right God) who had the right to take what they could capture. But the true history of that period is not merely the European version. And the deeds of these European colonisers is not the end of the story. An indigenist is one who aligns themselves with the native peoples and their struggles as victims of colonial aggression they neither asked for nor did anything to invite or provoke.

But there is another issue here and this is that civilisation, by which I mean our colonising civilisation if we are white Euro-American as a matter of cultural descent, is not silent about this. It too has need to shape the narrative. And so it too has need to keep colonising if by other means than dealing violence and stealing land. In this the weapons of intellectual colonisation are deployed as well, spreading their insidious and self-serving values as they go. This comes to the fore as in when the colonising civilisation plays up tribal differences in distinction to a common and general indigenous way of life:

"*The differences between the diverse peoples (or ethnic groups) have been accentuated by the colonizers as part of the strategy of domination. There have been attempts by some to fragment the Indian peoples…by establishing frontiers, deepening differences and provoking rivalries. This strategy follows a principal objective: domination, to which end it is attempted ideologically to demonstrate that in America, Western civilization is confronted by a magnitude of atomized peoples, differing from one another (every day more and more languages are 'discovered'). Thus, in consequence, such peoples are believed incapable of forging a future of their own. In contrast to this, the Indian thinking affirms the existence of one—a unique and different—Indian civilization, from which extend as particular expressions the cultures of diverse peoples. Thus, the identification and solidarity among*

Indians. Their 'Indianness' is not a simple tactic postulated, but rather the necessary expression of an historical unity, based in common civilization, which the colonizer has wanted to hide. Their Indianness, furthermore, is reinforced by the common experience of almost five centuries of [Eurocentric] domination."

It is hard to imagine your average European colonialist had much insight into the differences and diversities of broadly Indian culture. Could they have told a member of one tribe from another? But that works both ways since could an Indian tell a Dutch person from a French person or a Spaniard from an Englishman? The clash here, instead, is ethical, cultural – or, actually, in a relation to the natural and how that manifests itself in the context of culturally realised civilisation. What distinguishes the indigenous native Indian from a denizen of Western civilisation? Its a good question:

"*What, then, distinguishes Indian from Western civilization? Fundamentally, the difference can be summed up in terms of [humanity's] relationship with the natural world. For the West…the concept of nature is that of an enemy to be overcome, with man as boss on a cosmic scale. Man in the West believes he must dominate everything, including other [people around him] and other peoples. The converse is true in Indian civilization, where [humans are] part of an indivisible cosmos and fully aware of [their] harmonious relationship with the universal order of nature. [S]he neither dominates nor tries to dominate. On the contrary, she exists within nature as a moment of it… Traditionalism thus constitutes a potent weapon in the [indigenous] civilizations struggle for survival against colonial domination… the nature of the indigenist impulse is [then] essentially socialist, insofar as socialism—or what Karl Marx described as 'primitive communism'—was and remains the primary mode of indigenous social organization in the Americas.*"

Now we are getting at something, what seems to be emerging as a necessarily more wild indigenous approach to living. This incorporates what are described as “six fundamentals”, things which Ward Churchill associates with sociopolitical, cultural, and economic autonomy (or sovereignty) and self-determination:

“*First there is land. There are demands for occupied ancestral territories… demands for control of the use of the land and subsoil; and struggles against the invasion of… commercial interests. Defense of land held and recuperation of land lost are the central demands. Second, the demand for recognition of the ethnic and cultural specificity of the Indian is identified. All [indigenist] organizations reaffirm the right to be distinct in culture, language and institutions, and to increase the value of their own technological, social and ideological practices. Third is the demand for [parity] of political rights in relation to the state… Fourth, there is a call for the end of repression and violence, particularly that against the leaders, activists and followers of the Indians’ new political organizations. Fifth, Indians demand the end of family planning programmes which have brought widespread sterilization of Indian women and men. Finally, tourism and folklore are rejected, and there is a demand for true Indian cultural expression to be respected. The commercialization of Indian music and dance are often mentioned…and there is a particular dislike for the exploitation of those that have sacred content and purpose for Indians. An end to the exploitation of Indian culture in general is [demanded].*”

The indigenous requirement here, it can be seen, is for recognition of autonomy in a world in which the conquering civilisation simply wants to make all it captures a part of itself, something for its own uses, or else to destroy it as useless to it. (This can be argued as a broad colonial mantra: assimilate or die.) The American anthropologist James C. Scott, as mentioned before, has discussed this tendency of Western civilisation’s colonial

advances too when he discusses how individuality and locality are erased as things become part of the reorganised and renamed civilisational world. In such a process things lose their specific histories, associations and significances, swallowed up in the belly of the beast. Culture is thus erased as if it had never existed (although it always fights on, refusing to die as in the case of Irish, Welsh, Basque and other people overwhelmed by outsiders even in Europe). Wildness here is revealed as locality, specificity, community, diversity as people, as David Graeber discussed, who define themselves by choosing not to be like the others (cultural refusal). These are the wild ones who exist on the periphery, the marginal people. Such people, where they are indigenous, have been described as the inhabitants of a "Fourth World":

"*The 4th World is the name given to indigenous peoples descended from a country's aboriginal population and who today are completely or partly deprived of their own territory and its riches. The peoples of the 4th World have only limited influence or none at all in the nation state [in which they are now encapsulated]. The peoples to whom we refer are the Indians of North and South America, the Inuit (Eskimos), the Sami people [of northern Scandinavia], the Australian aborigines, as well as the various indigenous populations of Africa, Asia and Oceana.*"

Such wild refuseniks, however, are not likely to receive much of a hearing from their civilised colonisers. Here Ward Churchill's recitation of the so-called "Lone Wolf" case heard in the US Supreme Court in 1903 sounds typical. In this case the court ruled that any treaties Indians had signed with representatives of the US states were binding upon the Indians. But that they were simultaneously NOT binding upon the US parties to the very same treaties! This was apparently because the US had more power than the Indians did so the latter would just have to suck it up. Consequently, Indian land agreements, which in

today's terms might have been interpreted as Indians allowing rental use of their land, simply became regarded as bills of sale. The USA now owned the land and the Indians did not. The US Supreme Court had then essentially taken the view that possession counts as ownership and might makes right. Because the US could just take the land the law said it was fair enough if they just did so. But how is this any different from the Nazis taking the Sudetenland or marching into Poland? This is not really a Left/Right issue either on the civilisational political spectrum since Churchill makes the point that the political left has never been much interested in "rights for Indians" either. Instead, they have argued they aren't really qualified to judge since its "an Indian problem". Consequently, they have basically sided with civilisation and let it run its unpleasant and colonial course. (In confessional mode, honesty demands that I report on myself here too since, in past writing, I have dipped out of racial discussions since I "didn't feel qualified" to discuss them, thinking them "not my fight". I stand corrected and chastised.)

Here the difference is not then made according to civilisational political spectrums but according to differences in ethics and culture at the fundamental level. (For the wild and civilisation to be distinguished one must be able to articulate ethical and cultural differences between them.) In posing the hypothetical of what would happen if Indians actually did get their land back (as well as their autonomy in regard to it) Churchill takes this challenge head on. He writes:

"*Would sexism be perpetuated? Ask one of the Haudenosaunee clan mothers, who continue to assert political leadership in their societies through the present day. Ask Wilma Mankiller, recent head of the Cherokee Nation, a people traditionally led by what were called 'Beloved Women.' Ask a Lakota woman—or man, for that matter—about who it was that owned all real property in traditional society, and what that meant in terms of parity*

in gender relations. Ask a traditional Navajo grandmother about her social and political role among her people. Women in most traditional native societies not only enjoyed political, social, and economic parity with men, they often held a preponderance of power in one or more of these spheres.

Homophobia? Homosexuals of both genders were (and in many settings still are) deeply revered as special or extraordinary, and therefore spiritually significant, within most indigenous North American cultures. The extent to which these realities do not now pertain in native societies is exactly the extent to which Indians have been subordinated to the morés of the invading, dominating culture. Insofar as restoration of Indian land rights is tied directly to reconstitution of traditional indigenous social, political, and economic modes, you can see where this leads; the relations of sex and sexuality accord rather well with the aspirations of feminism and gay rights activism.

How about a restoration of native land rights precipitating some sort of 'environmental holocaust?' Let's get at least a little bit real here. If you're not addicted to the fabrications of Smithsonian anthropologists about how Indians lived, or to George Weurthner's eurosupremicist Earth First! fantasies about how we beat all the woolly mammoths and sabertoothed cats to death with sticks, then this question isn't even on the board. I know it's become fashionable among Washington Post editorialists to make snide references to native people 'strewing refuse in their wake' as they 'wandered nomadically' about the 'prehistoric' North American landscape. What is that supposed to imply? That we, who were mostly 'sedentary agriculturalists' in any event, were dropping plastic and aluminum cans as we went? Like I said, let's get real. Read the accounts of early European invaders about what they encountered: North America was invariably described as being a 'pristine wilderness' at the point of European arrival, despite the fact that it had been occupied by

fifteen or twenty million people enjoying a remarkably high standard of living for nobody knows how long: 40,000 years? 50,000 years? Longer? Now contrast that reality to what's been done to this continent over the past couple of hundred years by the culture Weurthner, the Smithsonian, and the Post represent, and you tell me about environmental devastation.

That leaves militarism and racism. Taking the last first, there really is no indication of racism in traditional Indian societies. To the contrary, the record reveals that Indians habitually intermarried between groups, and frequently adopted both children and adults from other groups. This occurred in precontact times between Indians, and the practice was broadened to include persons of both African and European origin—and ultimately Asian origin as well—once contact occurred. Those who were naturalized by marriage or adoption were considered members of the group, pure and simple. This was always the Indian view. The Europeans and subsequent Euroamerican settlers viewed things rather differently, however, and foisted off the notion that Indian identity should be determined primarily by 'blood quantum,' an outright eugenics code similar to those developed in places like Nazi Germany and apartheid South Africa. Now, that's a racist construction if there ever was one…

As to militarism, no one will deny that Indians fought wars among themselves both before and after the European invasion began. Probably half of all indigenous peoples in North America maintained permanent 'warrior' societies. This could perhaps be reasonably construed as 'militarism.' But not, I think, with the sense the term conveys within the European/Euroamerican tradition. There were never, so far as anyone can demonstrate, wars of annihilation fought in this hemisphere prior to the Columbian arrival. None. In fact, it seems that it was a more or less firm principle of indigenous warfare not to kill, the object being to demonstrate personal bravery, something which could be done only against a live

opponent. There's no honor to be had in killing another person, because a dead person can't hurt you. There's no risk. This is not to say that nobody ever died or was seriously injured in the fighting. They were, just as they are in full contact contemporary sports like football and boxing. Actually, these kinds of Euroamerican games are what I would take to be the closest modern parallels to traditional interindian warfare. For Indians, it was a way of burning excess testosterone out of young males, and not much more. So, militarism in the way the term is used today is as alien to native tradition as smallpox and atomic bombs."

All this seems fairly reasonable stuff. But it is Churchill's conclusion that kicks the coloniser in the nuts:

"*Not only is it perfectly reasonable to assert that a restoration of native control over unceded lands within the U.S. would do nothing to perpetuate such problems as sexism and classism, but the reconstitution of indigenous societies this would entail stands to free the affected portions of North America from such maladies altogether. Moreover, it can be said that the process should have a tangible impact in terms of diminishing such things elsewhere. The principle is this:* ***sexism, racism, and all the rest arose here as concomitants to the emergence and consolidation of the Eurocentric state form of sociopolitical and economic organization****. Everything the state does, everything it can do, is entirely contingent upon its maintaining its internal cohesion, a cohesion signified above all by its pretended territorial integrity, its ongoing domination of Indian Country. Given this, it seems obvious that the literal dismemberment of the state inherent to Indian land recovery correspondingly reduces the ability of the state to sustain the imposition of objectionable relations within itself. It follows that realization of indigenous land rights serves to undermine or destroy the ability of the status quo to continue imposing a racist, sexist, classist, homophobic, militaristic order upon nonindians.*" (Bold text mine.)

Put in my terms this statement opens up the clear daylight needed to distinguish the wild from the civilised. Ward Churchill is saying that the sexism, homophobia, environmental disregard and destruction, the murdering, thieving violence and all the rest WAS BROUGHT BY EUROPEAN CIVILISATION, it was not indigenous to the wild natives. These people organised themselves in completely different ways according to different values, ways which did not have such consequences. Indigenous life WAS NOT European civilised life (as even the Europeans would have themselves testified). Those who thought themselves superior as they conquered brought their own civilisational trash with them when they came and set about destroying the wild with and through it.

We can consider this experiment further by asking how the natives might treat the colonisers if all the land went back to those who originally populated it. And the problem there would be that the colonisers, fearing that the natives would act just like them because in their narcissistic and selfish way they cannot conceive that anyone would ever act any differently because they only ever think in terms of what they would do to others in that situation, would fear being thrown out and left destitute. But not so says Ward Churchill. The Indian natives, with their different values and different ways, would not really care who lived there so long as they lived according to certain basic, and unobtrusive, principles in accord with respect for each other and for the land. Decolonising then comes not to mean colonisation in reverse:

"*We decide for ourselves what degree of autonomy we wish to enjoy, and thus the nature of our political and economic relationship(s), not only with our former colonizers, but with all other nations as well… It is to arrive at new sets of relationships between peoples which effectively put an end to the era of international domination. The need is to gradually replace the existing world order with one which is predicated in collaboration and*

cooperation between nations. The only way to ever really accomplish that is to physically disassemble the gigantic state structures which evolved from the imperialist era, structures which are literally predicated in systematic intergroup domination and cannot in any sense exist without it. A concomitant of this disassembly is the inculcation of voluntary, consensual interdependence between formerly dominated and dominating nations, and a redefinition of the word 'nation' itself to conform to its original meaning: bodies of people bound together by their bioregional and other natural cultural affinities."

One value maintained in this process is a wild one, that in regard to the capacity of the land to support life simply of itself. (Compare civilisation which simply decides to live somewhere – in its tens of millions on occasion – and then simply exploits the surrounding environment in order to accumulate the resources to make this possible at all in the first place.):

"*The population of indigenous nations everywhere has always been determined by the number of people who could be sustained in a given environment or bioregion without overpowering and thereby destroying that environment. A very carefully calculated balance —one which was calibrated to the fact that in order to enjoy certain sorts of material comfort, human population had to be kept at some level below saturation —was always maintained between the number of humans and the rest of the habitat. In order to accomplish this, native peoples have always incorporated into the very core of our spiritual traditions the concept that all life forms and the earth itself possess rights equal to those enjoyed by humans.*

Rephrased, this means it would be a violation of a fundament of traditional indigenous law to supplant or eradicate another species, whether animal or plant, in order to make way for

some greater number of humans, or to increase the level of material comfort available to those who already exist. Conversely, it is a fundamental requirement of traditional law that each human accept his or her primary responsibility, that of maintaining the balance and harmony of the natural order as it is encountered. One is essentially free to do anything one wants in an indigenous society so long as this cardinal rule is adhered to."

Readers, it seems to me, will have to concur that this is not a tenet of European civilisational thinking. But it is and was a tenet of indigenous thinking. Europeans, however, and their American descendants most of all, became profligate exploiters of nature. Everything produced came from something extracted in order to become something consumed. This was done on a literally industrial scale. Civilisation, under Euro-American authority, became an exercise in planetary murder-suicide for the purposes of financial gain. Here what was being consumed, from an indigenous point of view, was literally the wild natural habitat – not just ours but of all living things. Churchill denominates this "a sickness centered in an utterly obsessive drive to dominate and destroy the natural order." This is not an indigenous desire. But he does push his argument a bit too far, going on about this planet "never being designed for" X amount of people. Well, no, its wasn't "designed" for X amount of people – because it wasn't "designed" at all. The point is to think locally, indigenously, with some semblance of a feral sensibility, and not like a denizen of civilisation who just decides to plonk 20 million people in the same place and then scour and exploit the earth for whatever it takes to keep them going regardless of where it comes from or what the further consequences are. As Ward Churchill then more correctly says:

"*If we are to be about turning power relations around between people, and between groups of people, we must also be about turning around the relationship between people and the*

rest of the natural order. If we don't, we'll die out as a species, just like any other species which irrevocably overshoots its habitat."

For this we need to become indigenous. Wild. Uncivilised.

So let us. Let us in fact become a fungus. Mycelium. Here I turn to Merlin Sheldrake's popular and award-winning book *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds and Shape Our Futures*. It is an eye-opening read full of wild insights. The bold claims for these organisms come right from the off:

"*FUNGI ARE EVERYWHERE but they are easy to miss. They are inside you and around you. They sustain you and all that you depend on. As you read these words, fungi are changing the way that life happens, as they have done for more than a billion years. They are eating rock, making soil, digesting pollutants, nourishing and killing plants, surviving in space, inducing visions, producing food, making medicines, manipulating animal behavior, and influencing the composition of the Earth's atmosphere. Fungi provide a key to understanding the planet on which we live, and the ways that we think, feel, and behave…*

Many of the most dramatic events on Earth have been—and continue to be—a result of fungal activity. Plants only made it out of the water around five hundred million years ago because of their collaboration with fungi, which served as their root systems for tens of million years until plants could evolve their own. Today, more than ninety percent of plants depend on mycorrhizal fungi—from the Greek words for fungus (mykes) and root (rhiza)—which can link trees in shared networks sometimes referred to as the 'wood wide web.' This ancient association gave rise to all recognizable life on land, the future of which depends on the continued ability of plants and fungi to form healthy relationships."

Talk here of “collaboration” and “shared networks” and “association” and “healthy relationships” should be instructive for they describe the means to the fecund world in which we live. Examples of living organisms across every species have not fought tooth and nail with each other to bring us to this situation – if they had what could really exist in a situation constituted only as total war? Rather, there has been a lot of mutuality and community going on. The biological and ecological word for this is SYMBIOSIS. Life living with – and even sometimes within – life. Uncivilised life, it turns out, is a social business. In terms of fungi, Sheldrake points to their “metabolic ingenuity” which allows them “to forge a wide variety of relationships”. Plants in general (and so land animals too in the end) could not survive without them. This is an unashamed image of the connection of all life – and certainly in the case of the bits you can see with your own eyes. But here is where the first warning is sounded:

“*Unsustainable agricultural practices reduce the ability of plants to form relationships with the beneficial fungi on which they depend. The widespread use of antifungal chemicals has led to an unprecedented rise in new fungal superbugs that threaten both human and plant health.*”

It might not be to smart, according to the way the wild has actually organised and evolved itself by itself, to artificially kill stuff off for the sake of purely human profit (and even then only in the case of a few humans rather than even all of them). But civilisation is not wild. It does not conform to its ethics, values or practices. It ignores it. It destroys it. It forgets that the wild and diverse fecundity of nature did not need a single human being to get this way and was not done for human benefit. Nevertheless even human assholery is helping the fungi anyway. It is just giving them new and artificial circumstances in which to evolve and develop further. Whatever individual (a misleading term in the biological

philosophy of symbiosis's terms) species does or does not survive in this world this proliferation of cooperative and diverse life itself goes on. Probably one thing could not kill all the other things because of this unless the planet itself were literally destroyed and exploded apart. "What about radiation?" you might ask. Some fungi eat radiation. Others eat the pollution humans create. Fungi are organisms which "provoke transformations" and in that they are the perfect examples of what biologists and ecologists have discovered is a truly symbiotic life:

"*The history of life turn(s) out to be full of intimate collaborations. Most plants, I learned, depend on fungi to provide them with nutrients from the soil, such as phosphorus or nitrogen, in exchange for energy-giving sugars and lipids produced in photosynthesis—the process by which plants eat light and carbon dioxide from the air. The relationship between plants and fungi gave rise to the biosphere as we know it and supports life on land to this day.*"

Our lives, it turns out, rely entirely on things we would easily destroy without thinking and without even realising they were there. Mycorrhizal relationships are the basis of all life on land on this planet. That is suggestive to me when one learns of the fundamental nature of relationship to this, relationships which are cooperative, about mutuality, sharing, community, support networks – and which result in a fecundity and increasing diversity of life. Does (European-invented capitalist) civilisation do this? No. It is the murder-suicide way of existing. It is about exploiting, coercing, taking, accumulating, killing. Relationships, then, organised in some ways but not in others, can lead to life. Sheldrake tells us that "The relationships between plants and mycorrhizal fungi are key to understanding how ecosystems work." And that tells us that life is about ever-expanding systems of life. No life is here on its own, in its own vacuum or bubble. A life is related to,

and consequential for, other life. How we relate, how we exist, matters. It has consequences. Perhaps the following information Merlin Sheldrake provides us is then pertinent:

"*Plants and mycorrhizal fungi are promiscuous: many fungi can live within the roots of a single plant, and many plants can connect with a single fungal network. In this way a variety of substances, from nutrients to signaling compounds, can pass between plants via fungal connections. In simple terms, plants are socially networked by fungi. This is what is meant by the 'wood wide web.' The tropical forests I worked in contained hundreds of plant and fungal species. These networks are inconceivably complicated…*"

That all seems very social, necessarily cooperative. (If you meet some other life what are you going to do? It might be best to get along with it. Being a legit member of some vast network must surely supply any living organism with things and opportunities going it alone never could.) But if you are a "rugged individualist" (as I believe some people try to pretend they are) then the news from the wild is about to get even worse for you:

"*For humans, identifying where one individual stops and another starts is not generally something we think about. It is usually taken for granted—within modern industrial societies, at least—that we start where our bodies begin and stop where our bodies end. Developments in modern medicine, such as organ transplants, worry these distinctions; developments in the microbial sciences shake them at their foundations. We are ecosystems, composed of—and decomposed by—an ecology of microbes, the significance of which is only now coming to light. The forty-odd trillion microbes that live in and on our bodies allow us to digest food and produce key minerals that nourish us. Like the fungi that live within plants, they protect us from disease. They guide the development of our bodies*

and immune systems and influence our behavior. If not kept in check, they can cause illnesses and even kill us. We are not a special case. Even bacteria have viruses within them (a nanobiome?). Even viruses can contain smaller viruses (a picobiome?). Symbiosis is a ubiquitous feature of life."

"Ubiquitous" is a very all-encompassing term. It would appear to mean "everything". It certainly means us, as Sheldrake makes abundantly clear. We are not "individuals". We are symbiotic communities – most of which aren't even "our" cells. But we wouldn't be alive without them nevertheless BECAUSE WE HAVE EVOLVED TOGETHER, our lives completely entwined. Even the professionals apparently have trouble with this (due to civilisation's intellectual colonisation of our minds). So, as Sheldrake then reports:

"*I attended a conference in Panama on tropical microbes, and along with many other researchers spent three days becoming increasingly bewildered by the implications of our studies. Someone got up to talk about a group of plants that produced a certain group of chemicals in their leaves. Until then, the chemicals had been thought of as a defining characteristic of that group of plants. However, it transpired that the chemicals were actually made by fungi that lived in the leaves of the plant. Our idea of the plant had to be redrawn. Another researcher interjected, suggesting that it may not be the fungi living inside the leaf that produced these chemicals but the bacteria living inside the fungus. Things continued along these lines. After two days, the notion of the individual had deepened and expanded beyond recognition. To talk about individuals made no sense anymore. Biology—the study of living organisms—had transformed into ecology—the study of the relationships between living organisms.*"

And this, it seems to me, is what being “uncivilised” is really all about. “Civilisation”, if I can then put it this way, is a human only arbitrary invention of a way of living, of a way of organising relations. It is one which puts everything at the service of human beings who live in cities. (One can get etymological here and refer back to the Latin origins and uses of our English word “civil” – which is to do with the public business of the city and its citizens.) It thinks of the world, and relationships with the world, as a matter of resources to enable the citified way of life. It has come to rely on all kinds of false notions – such as the one that we are “private individuals” (when we are actually living ecology, a combination of symbiotic organisms). Furthermore, the existence of life itself is this as well. No one is standing alone on their own two feet. No one has pulled themselves up by their boot straps. The way of life (in general) is, and has always been, a thoroughly symbiotic one of dependency, collaboration and sharing. “’We’,” says Sheldrake, “are ecosystems that span boundaries and transgress categories.” Or, to put it more aggressively: our intellectualisations of life are fantasies that serve partisan purposes. And, yes, mine do too. But they are in pursuance of wild life and not the civilisation of death, of murder-suicide, that is represented both in this particular chapter and right throughout this book. What even the most basic of reading about fungi or mycelial networks teaches us is that being uncivilised is very collaborative, very much about mutual benefit, about LIVING TOGETHER in a reflexive environment. You begin to see that life is relationships and the basis on which those relationships are formulated. You begin to see it can never just be about you (even if we concede that even thinking there is a you [in distinction to things that are not you] makes sense anymore.) Perhaps you need a further example:

“*LYNNE BODDY, A professor of microbial ecology at Cardiff University, has spent decades studying the foraging behavior of mycelium. Her elegant studies illustrate the problems*

that mycelial networks are able to solve. In one experiment, Boddy allowed a wood-rotting fungus to grow within a block of wood. She then placed the block on a dish. Mycelium spread radially outward from the block in all directions, forming a fuzzy white circle. Eventually the growing network encountered a new block of wood. Only a small part of the fungus touched the wood, but the behavior of the entire network changed. The mycelium stopped exploring in all directions. It withdrew the exploratory parts of its network and thickened the connection with the newly discovered block. After a few days, the network was unrecognizable. It had completely remodeled itself."

I think Sheldrake explains what this means in a further paragraph from the same chapter two of his book:

"*Mycelial coordination is difficult to understand because there is no center of control. If we cut off our head or stop our heart, we're finished. A mycelial network has no head and no brain. Fungi, like plants, are decentralized organisms. There are no operational centers, no capital cities, no seats of government. Control is dispersed: Mycelial coordination takes place both everywhere at once and nowhere in particular. A fragment of mycelium can regenerate an entire network, meaning that a single mycelial individual—if you're brave enough to use that word—is potentially immortal.*"

Strange that this fungal organism, this networked social being, has seemingly already achieved, for itself and without anything so quaint as "human intelligence", what every transhumanist has fever dreams about. But wait. It was uncivilised fungus that did this, uncivilised fungus without a brain, without any intelligent authority telling it what to do. In fact, nothing tells fungus what to do. It decides and behaves for itself. "No seats of government". Instead we are talking about "coordination" – but not as we would do if it

were us because how this coordination is actually happening can't even really be explained. We just ascertain that nothing and no part of the fungus is telling the rest of the fungus to act or be a certain way. And by this means it has basically come to be the basis of life on land. All life. It seems this is life. But what is life again?

"*all life-forms are in fact processes not things. The 'you' of five years ago was made from different stuff than the 'you' of today. Nature is an event that never stops. As William Bateson, who coined the word genetics, observed, 'We commonly think of animals and plants as matter, but they are really systems through which matter is continually passing.' When we see an organism, from a fungus to a pine tree, we catch a single moment in its continual development.*"

Where life is concerned this doesn't even matter. It is simply part of its morphology. Things change and so must the things that comprise them as a result. But civilisation would be deeply resistant to this idea. Civilisation is about fixing them in place and maintaining them that way. Of course, this too is completely misguided. With a sense of history everyone knows that civilisations rise and fall. And must. But whilst they exist the point is to keep things that way, to have no plan B. In civilisation as I have conceived it in this book, largely (but not only) based on the observation of Euro-American civilisation as it came to be in the last 400 years, everything that exists lives to service it. But, as Ward Churchill noted when discussing the First Peoples of America, this was never the indigenous way. And it is not the mycelial way either. The uncivilised do not behave as the civilised do. It is then about what is trying to be achieved. Uncivilised beings are not trying to achieve what civilised ones have been coerced to desire.

I could go on but I would only be repeating myself. So it is best to round things up at this point and move on. To do that we can begin by asking the most basic question: what is it to be “uncivilised”? I have several answers. First of all, and not least importantly, it is a matter of the uncivilised not being the civilised. It is a matter of a powerful, determined and insistent negation. It is a matter of the refusal to be determined and conditioned by civilisation and its ways. This is to be seen as a positive in the way that “no future” and “queer nihilism” was earlier. That, in turn, is linked to the idea that to be uncivilised must then be a matter of uncivilised desire (which we also saw earlier too). If we reject civilisation’s course it can only be because we choose to take responsibility for our own course and demand that measure of agency, autonomy and free association that is requisite with it – and with a wild, uncoerced ferity.

This becomes a matter of a new mindset, new practices, and new lifeways. Uncivilised and civilised are not the same, do not result in the same things and do not get where they are going by the same means or because of the same formulation of relations. Uncivilised, from our forcibly civilised vantage point, then means disruption, disjunction, change and transformation, of ourselves and our relations – and so, eventually, our world. This motivates my fourth point that being uncivilised can never be entirely passive – no matter how much we wish to avoid trouble or conflict. Civilisation is a coercive phenomenon. It sets out actively to colonise, intellectually and materially. That means there will be times we have to actively fight it, fend it off, destroy its effectiveness. This will be done by changing ourselves, yes, but more fundamentally by changing our relations and so our social reality. It is a social world and to change it you must change that social reality. It must become about the free cooperation, sharing, mutual interest and common benefit that so many aspects of wild life are actually about. So it is important then that my sixth and final point concerns our connection to the earth, a connection civilisation fatally

severs in acts of deliberate alienation. The world must become local again, about place and habitat, about intimacy and familiarity with one's surroundings. This must be treated as something vitally important, an aspect of who we are (for it is an aspect of who we are). We are of Earth.

"Being civilised" in the English language has been manipulated to mean something good, something desirable, something educated, something better than not being it. Taking the side of the uncivilised puts all of that in question. It wants to compare them as overall ethics in the round. It wants to bring out into the light all the pain, death, suffering and pollution that civilisation tries to brush under a carpet, burn or bury in a hole as if it had never existed. By all means say how you think civilisation has benefitted us. But only do so with the downsides (like possible mass extinction events or needless diseases and mental ill health epidemics) equally acknowledged. Who would embrace civilisation if they knew it was going to take global death and widespread, structurally necessary, suffering to achieve it? Only those already so damaged by it they could do no more than wish for more of the same (but hopefully not for them).

Yet in wildness, in uncivilisation, is a relational procession of forces that has been life-propagating for billions of years. It has achieved, all by itself, more than we ever could – and in a functionally sustainable way that involves life so diverse we will never remotely come close to cataloguing it all. It in fact includes us! The uncivilised realm achieved this with a stunning lack of overall plan, coercion, reason or desire. It was quite literally freedom, self-organising ultimately symbiotic processes of relation and inter-relation, proliferating themselves. I suggest that what being uncivilised finally means is recognising the wisdom in that.

15. Indigenous: A Complex Simplicity

"*The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying 'This is mine', and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not any one have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows, 'Beware of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody.'* — Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*

The reason I have placed this quote at the top of this chapter is quite a rudimentary one. This is that besides the obvious materiality, or the material consequences, I am also fundamentally imagining "uncivilised" in my last chapter and "indigenous" in this one as mentalities, approaches, contexts, stances, imaginaries that are also implicitly consequential. So in this chapter I am not just discussing the indigenous as a member of a particular tribe, for example. Indigenous here does not simply denominate particular racial or cultural kinds of people. Being indigenous for me in this chapter is something about how you imagine life and the world that it exists in. This chapter is then properly about what I am calling an indigenous mentality or imagination which can in principle be held by anyone with the ability to hold it. It is not then the possession of some by birth or heredity and unavailable to those others who happened to grow up in civilisation. "Indigenous" in this chapter is a state of mind (albeit one that many who are described as racially or culturally indigenous today will likely already be in possession of). Given this description, the point of my quote is then that the indigenous of mind have ideas and conceptions opening up to them of which the civilised are incapable *so long as they*

remain civilised. My suggestion is that these are ideas and conceptions we then need to have.

This idea was also suggested by my inclusion of Ward Churchill in the last chapter. His words have already introduced us to the notion that indigenous peoples do not THINK OR VALUE as civilised ones do. In this chapter I hope to introduce readers to some more ways in which they think - as presented to us by the work of anthropologists - but also to introduce how they most likely thought in history as well and that before "civilisation" even came along to boot. This will serve to show, if nothing else, that there is not simply one way to live, the civilisational way, and that people can make choices NOT to live certain ways as well as the opposite because the consequences of living in certain relations can be seen ahead of time and purposefully avoided as a consequence having once been rejected as unpalatable or undesired.

So, first of all, the question becomes what we are talking about when we discuss "the indigenous". Here we might first of all turn to a document produced by the United Nations and which is described as an "Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Voices" factsheet. Posing the questions "Who are indigenous peoples?" the reply given in the factsheet runs as follows:

"*It is estimated that there are more than 370 million indigenous people spread across 70 countries worldwide. Practicing unique traditions, they retain social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live. Spread across the world from the Arctic to the South Pacific, they are the descendants - according to a common definition - of those who inhabited a country or a geographical*

region at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived. The new arrivals later became dominant through conquest, occupation, settlement or other means.

Among the indigenous peoples are those of the Americas (for example, the Lakota in the USA, the Mayas in Guatemala or the Aymaras in Bolivia), the Inuit and Aleutians of the circumpolar region, the Saami of northern Europe, the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders of Australia and the Maori of New Zealand. These and most other indigenous peoples have retained distinct characteristics which are clearly different from those of other segments of the national populations."

Here we can see two primary markers of the indigenous from a modern political perspective:

1. They have their own distinct cultures and traditions.
2. They existed as a definable polity prior to some colonisation or other and so are, in some sense, a "First People" in that locale.

The factsheet then goes on to explain the term "indigenous" itself in the following way:

"*Considering the diversity of indigenous peoples, an official definition of 'indigenous' has not been adopted by any UN-system body. Instead the system has developed a modern understanding of this term based on the following:*

• *Self-identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member.*
• *Historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies*

• *Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources*

• *Distinct social, economic or political systems*

• *Distinct language, culture and beliefs*

• *Form non-dominant groups of society*

• *Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.*"

One point to note here is that all "indigenous" peoples are not alike. (For example, some may be sedentary whilst others are nomadic. Some might create social hierarchies and others may studiously avoid them.) In fact, not all of them are even happy to be called "indigenous". Others have their own preferred terms or even their own native terms of self-identity. Consequently, the UN factsheet prefers to "identify rather than define" who such people are as social groups. One important factor here, and one already pointed up in this book by the commentary of Ward Churchill in my last chapter, is the relation of indigenous peoples to land and locality. We may describe this relationship as even as important as a family one.

Meanwhile, in a special edition of the *European Scientific Journal* published in December 2013 titled "Who is Indigenous? Definitions of Indigeneity" the three Finnish authors of this essay from the University of Lapland have the following to say:

"*there is not any universal definition of the concept indigenous peoples. Often indigenous peoples are referred to as the disadvantaged descendants of the peoples that inhabited a territory prior to colonization or the formation of the existing state (Joona, 2012; International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs).*

The definition can be used for bringing out important common and topical issues of indigenous peoples, such as social, cultural, and political questions. As a concept, it also is connected with identity and its processes... The goal of the development of indigenous peoples' rights is to achieve self-determination in areas populated by these people groups."

In papers like this one it becomes clear that "indigenous" is being used not as an ethos, mentality or mode of imagination (which is how I want to use it here) but as a modern political category with a view to judging and adjudicating things such as political rights or modes of self-government in regard to those so identified. In other words, such activity is a matter of fitting "indigenous people" into a political world of nation states and discussing them in relation to "significant international agreements defining the rights of indigenous peoples." For example, these authors go on to say:

"*The position and rights of indigenous peoples gained a foothold at the political arenas of the world and in international agreements since the turn of the 1990s when indigenous peoples and minorities were started to be distinguished from each other. Indigenous peoples were considered to have collective rights regarding control over certain areas colonized by the mainstream population at a certain point of history.*"

Such an international political view of indigenous people, then, is based in asking and deciding how such people, so identified, should fit into the political reality of the world as it is today. Often this is complicated by the fact that such indigenous groups were historically screwed over (if not simply murdered in their droves) by a colonising power which devastated their polity, removed effective power from them, and then subjected them as citizens (if, indeed, they were lucky enough to be seen as "citizens" at all thereafter). In "Who is Indigenous? Definitions of Indigeneity", for example, we hear of

cases in Hawai'i, Canada and Aotearoa where, in each case, native, indigenous rights became controlled or adjudicated by colonial powers. Indeed, in such locations today to even be regarded as "indigenous" in this modern political sense (which may accrue certain modern political rights) is not simply a matter of saying "I am indigenous".

Fortunately, nothing I am going to talk about in the rest of this chapter is anything to do with modern states or their views and opinions on the subject (which are always for their own purposes anyway and these are purposes I find myself wholly at odds with). Instead, I want to begin by talking about some markers of the indigenous as I want to imagine it. If I were making a list of such appropriate characteristics it would go something like this:

1. It would be based in a simplicity of desire, and satisfying desires, in a context of an imagined abundance.

2. It would be based in a strong and direct connection to the wild. In fact, it would be life *in* the wild.

3. It would consequently be about locality and its contingency. The indigenous (like wild animals, in fact) form strong connections to place since their lives are all about where they are and being able to live their lives in such places, places which consequently become very meaningful to them.

4. It would be about a "wild temporality" that is utterly foreign to civilised notions of clock time or what Mark Rifkin calls "Settler Time" in his book *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*. The point to note here is that the

indigenous imagine time differently than the civilised. The sun and the moon mean much more to them than a clock does.

5. The indigenous are heirs of specific cultures (plural - no doubt encompassing specific and various beliefs, values, traditions and practices) which, in civilised terms, is never simply the mainstream or colonial culture. To be indigenous, then, is to develop one's own diversity and particularity of being and becoming. It is to walk one's own path with agency and autonomy.

6. The indigenous person is an uneconomic person (in contrast to the dictates, for example, of modern capitalism which requires each human adult to be an expressly economic person). They are not driven by profit, property or acquisition in general terms.

7. For such people existence is generally imagined as both social and self-sufficient at group level and as a polity.

8. The indigenous live in a world of dreams and a world that is alive. It is a world that encompasses both the material and the imaginary. This is precisely because it is a life lived in the wild.

This is not an exhaustive list and should not by any means be taken as definitive when it is intended to be merely suggestive. But I can begin filling it out by turning to some examples of classic anthropological scholarship. The first is Marshall Sahlins' essay "The Original Affluent Society" by which he means to refer to pre-agricultural and pre-civilisational indigenous people using my terms. (Here, as generally, "civilisation" is a term I reserve for the agricultural and eventually city-based developments of human society

that tend towards organised conglomeration. The indigenous as I imagine them want nothing to do with cities or its mass organisation since they were, and are, people of the wild.)

We would do well then to take heed of the anthropologist David Graeber's assertion in his forward to the Routledge Classics Edition of Sahlins' *Stone Age Economics* in which "The Original Affluent Society" is contained. Here Graeber simply states: "Everything must be reimagined".

Before coming to Sahlins' own text directly, it is as well to note Graeber's reading of it. (Graeber was formerly a graduate student of Sahlins who later also became his colleague.) Here the first important thing to recognise is the idea that:

"*Our assumption that humanity began, effectively, as slaves to their material conditions, locked in a desperate struggle for survival, and that science and resulting technological progress has been a gradual and inevitable process of liberation from material necessity, was itself based on ignoring the scientific evidence. Life in the Paleolithic—which, after all, is at least 90 percent of human history—was in no sense a struggle for existence. In fact, for most of our history, humans have lived a life of great material abundance. This is because 'abundance' is not an absolute measure; it means when you have easy access to large amounts of the things that you want or think you need. In relation to their needs, most hunter-gatherers are rich. Most of all, their hours of labour would be the envy of any modern wage-slave of today.*"

This is simply to acknowledge that if you have everything you actually need then you are not poor: you are rich. I see a lot of Cynic thinking in this for the Cynic deliberately chose a

life of poverty – which he eulogised – whilst also begging – but also simultaneously imagining himself a king. At the very least the Cynic way of life was to ask the question of what genuine riches, and richness of living, are. In the anthropological context here "abundance" is having a ready and steady supply of what you need and when you think about that it is actually relatively little – food and water, rudimentary, but wholly sufficient, clothing and shelter, and company. When we remind ourselves that these pre-civilisational ancestors of ours had all their time to themselves and no one of any kind obligating them to anything that "abundance" only increases multiply.

Meanwhile, Graeber's second remark I noted was as follows:

"*How, he (i.e. Sahlins) has effectively asked, is it we come to define our world around what we think it lacks, around the degree to which we find it inadequate to the fulfillment of our material desires? Once framed that way there is only one possible answer: there is something wrong with our desires, or at least what we believe our desires to be. (This is actually a further complicating factor: in much of history, even when most people were convinced humans were incorrigible creatures, very few actually acted that way.) Why did we come to abandon Paleolithic affluence and actually create a world in which most of us actually do live lives of scarcity?*"

This remark addresses the perhaps unanswerable question of what the paleolithic human being wanted out of life in comparison to what people are told they want (or should want) now. The suggestion from Graeber is that when we dive (very shortly) into what Sahlins actually says in his noteworthy essay we find it a matter of "desires" – or perhaps even a studied lack of them in comparison with the world of today where all sorts of crazy, unethical and frankly suicidal desires are actively stimulated and promoted for

modern human beings. Life in today's world is about wanting things and being able to get them (seemingly regardless of cost or consequence). But why, Graeber suggests, if we really did "have it all" back several thousands of years ago before the first city had ever been built? It is also further to ask about "material desires" themselves and how necessary to an "affluent" life they actually are.

But let's actually dig in to Sahlins' text here for ourselves. We should note it begins, as many great texts do, by positioning itself in opposition to a consensus, in this case the economic consensus that life for paleolithic humans was Hobbesian and bleak:

"*Almost universally committed to the proposition that life was hard in the paleolithic, our textbooks compete to convey a sense of impending doom, leaving one to wonder not only how hunters managed to live, but whether, after all, this was living? The specter of starvation stalks the stalker through these pages. His technical incompetence is said to enjoin continuous work just to survive, affording him neither respite nor surplus, hence not even the 'leisure' to 'build culture.' Even so, for all his efforts, the hunter pulls the lowest grades in thermodynamics—less energy/capita/year than any other mode of production. And in treatises on economic development he is condemned to play the role of bad example: the so-called 'subsistence economy'.*"

Regular and sustainable subsistence, you may reflect, is hardly a bad thing. Yet it is if you are a modern academic or economist who imagines life is about "leisure" or "building culture" perhaps replete with various "labour-saving" devices not to mention the odd luxury. But Sahlins is immediately onto the fact that judgements such as these about both ourselves and our ancient hunter-gatherer ancestors are to beg the question of exactly what life is about and what "affluence" even is to begin with:

"*By the common understanding, an affluent society is one in which all the people's material wants are easily satisfied. To assert that the hunters are affluent is to deny then that the human condition is an ordained tragedy, with man the prisoner at hard labor of a perpetual disparity between his unlimited wants and his insufficient means.*

For there are two possible courses to affluence. Wants may be 'easily satisfied' either by producing much or desiring little. The familiar conception, the Galbraithean way, makes assumptions peculiarly appropriate to market economies: that man's wants are great, not to say infinite, whereas his means are limited, although improvable: thus, the gap between means and ends can be narrowed by industrial productivity, at least to the point that 'urgent goods' become plentiful. But there is also a Zen road to affluence, departing from premises somewhat different from our own: that human material wants are finite and few, and technical means unchanging but on the whole adequate. Adopting the Zen strategy, a people can enjoy an unparalleled material plenty—with a low standard of living.

That, I think, describes the hunters. And it helps explain some of their more curious economic behavior: their 'prodigality' for example—the inclination to consume at once all stocks on hand, as if they had it made. Free from market obsessions of scarcity, hunters' economic propensities may be more consistently predicated on abundance than our own. Destutt de Tracy, 'fish-blooded bourgeois doctrinaire' though he might have been, at least compelled Marx's agreement on the observation that 'in poor nations the people are comfortable,' whereas in rich nations 'they are generally poor.'"

Sahlins presents this generally as a prejudice – "they haven't got what we've got so they can't be as good". But, one is moved to reflect on reading this, perhaps it also has to be the case that they cannot be imagined to be as good *in any sense*. We cannot be allowed

to imagine either that they have found some primitive and perhaps lost sense of "affluence" which is beyond we civilised who have become obsessed with material possession and acquisition in a way that they were not. Perhaps we need some rock bottom, animalistic and basically primitive starting point from which to weave our fabric of inevitable human progress? ("A man who spends his whole life following animals just to kill them to eat, or moving from one berry patch to another, is really living just like an animal himself" Sahlins quotes from some 1957 anthropological treatise.) But this is "bourgeois ethnocentrism" Sahlins suggests, the past being judged by those inhabited by a "business economy" defined by the creation of false scarcity and the implanted desire to want more of whatever crap capitalism is forcing on us today. Thus, "having equipped the hunter with bourgeois impulses and paleolithic tools, we judge his situation hopeless in advance." But judged on their own terms, might they not be seen to have all they actually desired and everything they needed to provide for it? Sounds like affluence to me. For what can affluence actually be except being rich *on your own terms?*

But not all anthropologists have taken this view anyway. Sahlins quotes Sir George Grey from 1841 (he had studied the indigenous in Australia) who had a more positive view of the aborigines he encountered there:

"*Generally speaking, the natives live well; in some districts there may be at particular seasons of the year a deficiency of food, but if such is the case, these tracts are, at those times, deserted. It is, however, utterly impossible for a traveller or even for a strange native to judge whether a district affords an abundance of food, or the contrary . . . But in his own district a native is very differently situated; he knows exactly what it produces, the proper time at which the several articles are in season, and the readiest means of procuring them.*

According to these circumstances he regulates his visits to different portions of his hunting ground; and I can only say that I have always found the greatest abundance in their huts."

To this we may add a more equivocal appraisal of the Kalahari Bushmen known to us as the !Kung which Sahlins quotes in regard to from 1961:

"*As the !Kung come into more contact with Europeans—and this is already happening—they will feel sharply the lack of our things and will need and want more. It makes them feel inferior to be without clothes when they stand among strangers who are clothed. But in their own life and with their own artifacts they were comparatively free from material pressures. Except for food and water (important exceptions!) of which the Nyae Nyae !Kung have a sufficiency—but barely so, judging from the fact that all are thin though not emaciated—they all had what they needed or could make what they needed, for every man can and does make the things that men make and every woman the things that women make. . . . They lived in a kind of material plenty because they adapted the tools of their living to materials which lay in abundance around them and which were free for anyone to take (wood, reeds, bone for weapons and implements, fibers for cordage, grass for shelters), or to materials which were at least sufficient for the needs of the population. . . . The !Kung could always use more ostrich egg shells for beads to wear or trade with, but, as it is, enough are found for every woman to have a dozen or more shells for water containers—all she can carry—and a goodly number of bead ornaments. In their nomadic hunting-gathering life, travelling from one source of food to another through the seasons, always going back and forth between food and water, they carry their young children and their belongings. With plenty of most materials at hand to replace artifacts as required, the ! Kung have not developed means of permanent storage and have not needed or wanted to encumber themselves with surpluses or duplicates. They do not even want to carry one of*

everything. They borrow what they do not own. With this ease, they have not hoarded, and the accumulation of objects has not become associated with status."

In these two quotations we learn that even relatively modern and certainly Western observers can notice the indigenous connection to the land and to the wild. It is what they interact with in order to provide for their needs and they use simple skills in tandem with the panoply of naturally occurring resources to supply them. Such people have developed their own ways of life which include their own imaginaries of that life and what is needful to it. This includes the invention of social systems and ways of living suited to their lives which provide what the observer quoted calls "material plenty" (which, of course, is always relative in any and every case). What they need they collect and if they need something to help with that they make it with their own hands as necessary. Of this Sahlins himself comments:

"*Such 'material plenty' depends partly upon the ease of production, and that upon the simplicity of technology and democracy of property. Products are homespun: of stone, bone, wood, skin— materials such as 'lay in abundance around them.' As a rule, neither extraction of the raw material nor its working up take strenuous effort. Access to natural resources is typically direct—'free for anyone to take'—even as possession of the necessary tools is general and knowledge of the required skills common. The division of labor is likewise simple, predominantly a division of labor by sex. Add in the liberal customs of sharing, for which hunters are properly famous, and all the people can usually participate in the going prosperity, such as it is.*"

But this all causes Sahlins to ponder for a moment. If living life like this is relatively easy and relatively abundant doesn't it also rest on actually not wanting that much out of life, either an absence or containment of material desire, a kind of simplicity? He writes:

"*But, of course, 'such as it is': this 'prosperity' depends as well upon an objectively low standard of living. It is critical that the customary quota of consumables (as well as the number of consumers) be culturally set at a modest point. A few people are pleased to consider a few easily-made things their good fortune: some meagre pieces of clothing and rather fugitive housing in most climates; plus a few ornaments, spare flints and sundry other items such as the 'pieces of quartz, which native doctors have extracted from their patients' (Grey); and, finally, the skin bags in which the faithful wife carries all this, 'the wealth of the Australian savage'.*

For most hunters, such affluence without abundance in the nonsubsistence sphere need not be long debated. A more interesting question is why they are content with so few possessions—for it is with them a policy, a 'matter of principle' as Gusinde says… and not a misfortune.

Want not, lack not. But are hunters so undemanding of material goods because they are themselves enslaved by a food quest 'demanding maximum energy from a maximum number of people,' so that no time or effort remains for the provision of other comforts? Some ethnographers testify to the contrary that the food quest is so successful that half the time the people seem not to know what to do with themselves. On the other hand, movement is a condition of this success, more movement in some cases than others, but always enough to rapidly depreciate the satisfactions of property. Of the hunter it is truly said that his wealth is a burden. In his condition of life, goods can become 'grievously

oppressive,' as Gusinde observes, and the more so the longer they are carried around. Certain food collecters do have canoes and a few have dog sleds, but most must carry themselves all the comforts they possess, and so only possess what they can comfortably carry themselves. Or perhaps only what the women can carry: the men are often left free to react to the sudden opportunity of the chase or the sudden necessity of defense. As Owen Lattimore wrote in a not too different context, 'the pure nomad is the poor nomad.' Mobility and property are in contradiction."

Again, this sounds like Cynics who made a virtue of only having what they could carry in their *pera* and so exactly of "simplicity". So it is fortunate, then, that anthropologists can report of such hunter-gatherers as Sahlins has been discussing that they have "no sense of possession". But it does fox these same anthropologists when wanting to give them gifts – for pretty much anything they can give is only a burden to the thusly indigenous. Of this Sahlins notes that "modesty of material requirements is institutionalized: it becomes a positive cultural fact" and he quotes another who says that "The ultimate value is freedom of movement." If only we in the West thought the same we might actually be freer. Or even free at all. The point is made here, however, that, in such cases, property is contrary to their entire style of living. Acquisition and property worship is for the sedentary.

This prompts Sahlins to refer to such hunter-gatherers as "uneconomic man" (a description I took up in my own indicators of the indigenous earlier having first read this). What this means in reality is that such a person has contained their material desires to the point where economic activity becomes simply unnecessary – self-sufficient as such groups will be in any case. Such a person living in the way that they do has no need for anything which would require economics. The Cynic, of course, has done the same but in

another way and more often individually. Both have effectively eliminated the category of "worldly goods". But Sahlins makes a further good point in this respect for phrasing it like this makes it sound like such people have managed to control an impulse that was always and inevitably there. The reality, however, is that such people "renounced an acquisitiveness that in reality was never developed". Such desires were never fanned or encouraged in the first place. They developed and evolved as non-acquisitive, non-property-holding people. So: "It is not that hunters and gatherers have curbed their materialistic 'impulses'; they simply never made an institution of them." Which seems to me to be saying that desire for things, for acquisition and possession, for property holding, is not a human duty. Its a human decision. A consequential human decision. One can value other things – like mobility, freedom or certain kinds of relationships – instead if one chooses to. And the way you live your life will have a large bearing on what it then seems to require or to reject. It is then timely that Sahlins comments:

"*We are inclined to think of hunters and gatherers as poor because they don't have anything; perhaps better to think of them for that reason as* ***free****.*" (his emphasis)

If the hunter-gatherer is an uneconomic human being they are largely also a willingly unproductive one by the standards of a Western civilisational Protestantism which preaches that "God helps those who help themselves" and sees nobility in toil, toil, moreover, which it measures and uses as a standard of human worth. As Sahlins has this it is a matter for the rhythm of a life of subsistence. It is noted by many observers now (and much more so than in the commentary Sahlins was himself questioning) that hunter-gatherers have a very favourable work schedule in relation to their Western counterparts who are told they must "earn a living". He writes:

"*A good case can be made that hunters and gatherers work less than we do; and, rather than a continuous travail, the food quest is intermittent, leisure abundant, and there is a greater amount of sleep in the daytime per capita per year than in any other condition of society.*"

In this respect the word "loafers" is used and it is noted by Western observers of such indigenous cultures that when the hunter-gatherers even do get on with what we might call chores like food preparation or food gathering they don't do as much of it as they could or might. As Sahlins quotes one observer then:

"*The quantity of food gathered in one day by any of these groups could in every instance have been increased. Although the search for food was, for the women, a job that went on day after day without relief, they rested quite frequently, and did not spend all the hours of daylight searching for and preparing food. The nature of the men's food-gathering was more sporadic, and if they had a good catch one day they frequently rested the next. . . . Perhaps unconsciously they weigh the benefit of greater supplies of food against the effort involved in collecting it, perhaps they judge what they consider to be enough, and when that is collected they stop.*"

The suggestion here is that the hunter-gatherers both pace themselves and also take the view that "enough is enough". In other words, these are not tasks to burn oneself out over. Instead, both men and women are seen to spend goodly amounts of time talking, eating or sleeping during the day (with a sleep of an hour or more after the midday meal especially common. Sleeping might also occur when returning from a hunt or from gathering fruits, nuts or vegetables, etc.). This lifestyle might be described as indolent but from my lips that is certainly no insult. It is indicative of an approach to both life and time

that is more indigenous than civilised. One does not actually need to do a heap of “work” if one is a hunter-gatherer living in a subsistence manner. One just needs to do enough and it doesn’t take much to feed a small group of people for a day or two if your surroundings are rich in food sources and water supply. So there is then constantly this rhythm of doing enough and then having a rest/leisure time. Actual “work” (such as it is in these scenarios) might take up only around 15 hours per week with around 4 or 5 days of a week simply at the disposal of people to do whatever. So as another report Sahlins quotes then says of African Bushmen:

“*A woman gathers on one day enough food to feed her family for three days, and spends the rest of her time resting in camp, doing embroidery, visiting other camps, or entertaining visitors from other camps. For each day at home, kitchen routines, such as cooking, nut cracking, collecting firewood, and fetching water, occupy one to three hours of her time. This rhythm of steady work and steady leisure is maintained throughout the year. The hunters tend to work more frequently than the women, but their schedule is uneven. It is not unusual for a man to hunt avidly for a week and then do no hunting at all for two or three weeks. Since hunting is an unpredictable business and subject to magical control, hunters sometimes experience a run of bad luck and stop hunting for a month or longer. During these periods, visiting, entertaining, and especially dancing are the primary activities of men.*”

This does not exactly sound like the life of slavery to nature that the academics Sahlins questions would like to portray. In fact, he notes, through studies such as those of the British anthropologist James Woodburn with the Hadza of Northern Tanzania, that they will act on purpose to keep their leisure in preference to more work – and expressly on the grounds that “more work” is not a good thing. Their attitude is one of “Why should we

do more work when there is a natural sustaining abundance we can gather from relatively easily all around us?" Thus: "a pristine affluence colors their economic arrangements, a trust in the abundance of nature's resources rather than despair at the inadequacy of human means." Such people can consequently be remarked by Western observers to be "never in a hurry" and, in this respect, quite different from we Westerners for whom everything is a rush governed by the clock and "appointments". This can all seem rather lackadaisical and disorganised to the Western observer who imagines that hoarding and husbanding of supplies is the way to go in an imaginary based on planning and which discourages what they see as random impracticality. The hunter-gatherer, however, simply trusts to the abundance amongst which they are moving and so, for example, has no qualms about holding a communal feast which uses up all that the current camp has to offer in one sitting. It is, additionally, speculated that this is also why such people don't adapt to food storage. If food is harvested and then stored it will quickly deplete a region of its sustenance yet anchor the people to where this food has been stored. Much better, then, to simply move about nature's own storehouse which is laid out before everybody.

But there is also more to it than this for the practical "storage" can soon become the more morally inflected "hoarding", "possession" or "acquisition". If one has stores it might then become a question who has access to said stores or power over them. By avoiding such things these moral questions, and their social and political consequences, never even arise. Instead hunter-gatherers are famously known for sharing out their supplies between their group, for their copious leisure time and for their preference for a way of life that they have mastered over it being the master of them. Consequently, Sahlins can observe, when comparing this way of life to one more civilised, that "traditional formulas might be truer if reversed: the amount of work (per capita) increases with the evolution of culture, and the amount of leisure decreases" and that "the amount of hunger

increases relatively and absolutely with the evolution of culture." He thus concludes, quite famously, that:

"*The world's most primitive people have few possessions, **but they are not poor**. Poverty is not a certain small amount of goods, nor is it just a relation between means and ends; above all it is a relation between people. Poverty is a social status. As such it is the invention of civilization. It has grown with civilization, at once as an invidious distinction between classes and more importantly as a tributary relation—that can render agrarian peasants more susceptible to natural catastrophes than any winter camp of Alaskan Eskimo.*" (emphasis his)

This social view of poverty as a matter of human relations is an important insight and one we also see in the work of the aforementioned James Woodburn with African indigenous peoples. He refers explicitly in his research to two types of hunter-gatherer people who arrange their polity in slightly different ways and I would like to example them below now. In making these comments in his essay "African hunter-gatherer social organisation: is it best understood as a product of encapsulation?" he is interested to flesh out earlier ideas of his about "the relevance of political and economic relationships with neighbouring pastoral and agricultural societies for understanding hunter-gatherer social and economic organization." As a consequence he distinguishes two sorts of hunter-gatherer, the "immediate-return" hunter-gatherer and the "delayed-return" hunter gatherer. They are described by Woodburn as follows:

"*An immediate-return system is one in which activities oriented to the present (rather than to the past or the future) are stressed; in which people deploy their labour to obtain food and other resources which will be used on the day they are obtained or casually over the*

days that follow; in which people use simple, portable, utilitarian, easily acquired, replaceable tools and weapons made with real skill but not involving a great deal of labour; in which people do not hold valued assets which represent a yield, a return for labour applied over time, or valued assets which are held and managed in a way which resembles and has similar social implications to delayed yields on labour; in which people are systematically disengaged from assets, from the potential in assets for creating dependency.

A delayed-return system is one in which, in contrast, activities are oriented to the past and the future as well as to the present; in which people hold rights over valued assets of some sort, which either represent a yield, a return for labour applied over time or, if not, are held and managed in a way which resembles and has similar social implications to delayed yields on labour. In delayed-return hunting and gathering systems these assets are of four main types, which may occur separately but are more commonly found in combination with one another and are mutually reinforcing.

(1) Valuable technical facilities used in production: boats, nets, artificial weirs, stockades, pit-traps, beehives and other such artefacts which are a product of considerable labour and from which a food yield is obtained gradually over a period of months or years.

(2) Processed and stored food or materials usually in fixed dwellings.

(3) Wild products which have themselves been improved or increased by human labour: wild herds which are culled selectively, wild food-producing plants which have been tended, and so on.

(4) Assets in the form of rights held by men over their female kin who are then bestowed in marriage on other men.

Some hunter-gatherers have immediate-return systems and some have delayed-return systems. All other societies (with a very small number of possible exceptions) have delayed-return systems."

Now why this is important is because it exists in a social and political world of change. Woodburn, for example, is not arguing here for static groupings which never change over time. He is arguing something else entirely, in fact:

"*I have argued that both immediate- and delayed-return systems are likely to have existed even in the pre-Neolithic period (i.e. before about 10,000 BCE), though their relative frequency would probably have been quite different from today. I have also argued that in history there have been changes in both directions — from delayed-return systems to systems of immediate return and vice versa — and have suggested in a preliminary way a range of factors that are likely, singly or in combination, to have promoted one type of system or the other or to have generated shifts from one to the other. Contact with other societies is one such factor. I have claimed that 'the contact situation and the political and economic relationships with non¬hunting outsiders are relevant. Turnbull (1965a) and Gardner (1966; 1969; 1972) both discuss societies with systems of immediate return, and attribute the systems directly to the relationships with outsiders. Turnbull, in his discussion of the Mbuti Pygmies, argues that their mobility and flexibility are a means by which they seek to avoid political domination by their agricultural neighbours. Gardner sees the situation more starkly and argues that the immediate-return system of the Paliyan groups which he studied is pathological and the result of breakdown caused by the dominance and*

exploitation of their predatory peasant neighbours. Both authors are, I think, wrong in treating immediate return as an unusual system which requires special explanation. As the examples I have listed earlier in this paper illustrate, the system is widespread and not all the societies in question suffer from exploitation by neighbours. At the same time I think the idea should be treated seriously and we should consider whether pressure from outsiders is one of the factors which tends, in combination with other factors, to push societies towards immediate-return systems. I think it is plausible to suggest that it is and that in a world consisting exclusively of hunters and gatherers, a higher proportion might have had delayed-return systems'."

One thing I would point out straightaway here is that, when left to themselves, people can and do organise themselves in all sorts of ways and are bound to do so in no one way in particular. A history of the world's peoples and cultures that was sufficiently detailed would demonstrate this time and time again. This, in the wild, in fact, is exactly as it should be. Forms of life in general, human, animal and plant, manufacture their own lives and existences in accordance with the freedom they have in doing so. Evolution can even be seen as a theory of why and how this happens. The hunter-gatherers interest me in particular, however, because they are likely to be an exceedingly ancient form of indigenous human social existence that existed long before the neolithic period which modern historians, anthropologists and archaeologists associate with the rise of agriculture and settled civilisation. So, in other words, before we became civilised we were much more like hunter-gatherers. Thus it is interesting to ask what they are/were like. James Woodburn is one anthropologist who has also had a fascination with such people as they still continue to exist (although with increasing difficulty in a modern world that finds the nomadic and mobile suspicious). In his essay from 2005 (almost 50 years after he began his career) "Egalitarian Societies Revisited" he says many interesting

things about especially the immediate-return hunter-gatherers he has focused his career on, even to the extent of field research living among them as in the case of the Hadza in Tanzania. Thus, he begins this essay by saying:

"*the social systems of hunter-gatherer societies, like those of other societies, are best understood when seen in relation to the way in which the rights of individuals and of groups over what we term property are held and transacted. Rights over land and resources, over tools and weapons and other moveable property, over game meat and harvested vegetable food, over knowledge and intellectual property and over certain capacities of people such as their hunting labour or their reproductive capacity – all these and other property rights are central in the operation of social relations and social groupings and in the way in which these social relations and social groupings change through history. Most important of all, I would claim that it is through rights to property, and the ideologies linked with such rights, that structures of equality and inequality among the kin and other close associates with whom hunter-gatherers live and work are established and maintained.*"

He continues:

"*For me, then, immediate-return systems are to be understood not as part systems, but as coherent systems capable of functioning in a largely self-dependent manner, viable and enduring in their own right and with a momentum that is primarily internally derived. Quite simply they, with hunter-gatherer delayed-return systems in all their many varieties, constitute the two alternative viable forms of hunter-gatherer organisation. Both are likely to be ancient as well as modern. In the pre-agricultural period both are likely to have existed, though the frequency of occurrence of each type may well have been different then. For sub-Saharan Africa I think it would be reasonable to claim that in a world*

consisting exclusively of hunter-gatherers a higher proportion may have had delayed-return systems. Immediate-return systems, though not simple in form, are intrinsically simpler than delayed-return systems and it seems plausible to argue that there will have been a time at which all societies had immediate-return systems.

The present-day form of immediate-return systems is not the only possible form. In the usual and widespread contemporary form a number of distinctive characteristics are interdependent, indeed are tightly interlocked: a system of material production for immediate use without significant storage or investment; an egalitarian ideology and an egalitarian practice in which even intergenerational relationships are near-equal; a system of social relations and social groupings minimising dependence and stressing direct, individual access to material resources, to knowledge and to skills with these resources, this knowledge and these skills not controlled or allocated by people of senior generation; an emphasis on individual freedom to select on a day-to-day basis one's residential and other associates; a system of transactions focused on entitlement to share other people's recognised property, the recognised yield of other people's labour…

If large animals are killed, there are likely to be only two ways in which the meat can be used in an orderly way. It can either be distributed using the institutional apparatus of delayed return – intergenerational authority, committed kinship ties, corporate households with household heads, lineages and clans or other extra-household kinship groupings – or else it can be distributed through the obligatory sharing mechanisms characteristic of immediate-return systems like those of the Hadza, the Mbuti or the !Kung, in which an egalitarian ideology is combined with a strongly expressed entitlement to share beyond the boundary of the household. If there was a time before the development of delayed return when all societies had immediate-return systems, the most plausible hypothesis is that most

such systems were not radically dissimilar to those of today. So I am making here – perhaps unwisely – a very sweeping claim. Such immediate-return systems constitute a stable and enduring social form, internally coherent and meaningful to participants in them, not just capable of self-replication but tending always to self-replication."

It is when Woodburn gets to "the nature of immediate-return systems", however, that this becomes really interesting to me:

"*My argument is that [immediate-return systems of hunter-gatherers] are societies of equals because in these societies equality is actively promoted and inequality is actively resisted through a set of coherent interlocked and mutually reinforcing institutional procedures.*

These institutional procedures together constitute one particular resolution – an extreme one – of the coexisting pressures for equality and for inequality which are present in the desires of every one of us as an individual and in the operation of the political systems, and indeed of the kinship systems and the religious systems, of every human society. The vast majority of the world's social systems provide people both with contexts in which they interact with others of their own ethnic group as equals and also with contexts in which they interact with others of their own ethnic group as unequals. Hunter-gatherer societies with immediate-return systems are unique in the degree to which almost all of the social contexts within these societies maximise equality although, of course, members of most of these societies today have much experience of inequality – usually profound inequality – in their dealings with members of other ethnic groups because, as people identified as hunter-gatherers, they are so politically weak and so subject to discrimination. (See below for more on that.)

Members of societies with immediate-return systems are, I have argued, ideologically egalitarian, active promoters of equality and active resisters of inequality in all its dimensions within their own communities. Equality is perceived as meritorious, as worthy, as honourable, and inequality as unacceptable, as disreputable and even as evil and dangerous.

The equality that is sought is to a considerable degree actually achieved. Those people in these societies who go against public opinion by seeking to assert authority over others, by seeking to obtain and to retain more assets than others, or by claiming higher status than others, live lives which seem often to be full of anger and anguish. Because their approach to life has no legitimacy in the eyes of the other members of their communities, sooner or later they are likely to have to face a degree of ostracism, conflict and rejection. It is striking to me that the Hadza, who are today under great stress from land loss and other pressures, seem to reserve their most trenchant criticisms and passionate denunciations for those fellow Hadza who offend against the ethic of equality… I argue that certain key mechanisms are at work in these societies which together have the effect of creating a degree of human equality greater than that achieved in any other human societies. Three mechanisms are particularly significant:

1. Provision of direct access to material resources, knowledge and skills. Unlike almost all other human societies, people – men, women and older children alike – are entitled to direct and immediate access to the ungarnered food and other resources of their country. These rights of access are not formally allocated to them and cannot be withdrawn from them. Neither parents nor other kin provide, control or direct access. Nor do political authorities (apart nowadays, in some cases, from alien political authorities outside their own ethnic group). These open rights of access to material resources are matched by open access to

secular knowledge and skills, and especially to those connected with subsistence. Apart from some limited restrictions linked to the division of labour by sex, there is almost no secular specialisation of knowledge and skills and certainly no legitimacy for any notion that areas of secular knowledge and skill could properly be reserved for or held exclusively by particular individuals or groups. The principle of open and uncontrolled access by members of one's own community applies equally, then, to both material resources and to secular intellectual resources.

2. Autonomy: freedom to move around and to live and work with freely chosen associates. It is not just that this right exists. What matters is that it is constantly exercised, limiting enduring bonds and subverting any development of authority and dependency within one's own ethnic community.

3. Obligation to share. While all individuals have an automatic right of access to ungarnered resources, they are elaborately constrained about how they can use them. Garnered resources have to be shared and used immediately. They cannot be accumulated for later use. Nor can they be given to other people in order to accumulate in another way, that is in terms of claims for future reciprocation. In many of these societies the model for sharing lies in the distribution of the meat of large game animals among all the people of a nomadic camp. Typically other things are less elaborately and less widely shared, but always the emphasis is on the immorality of accumulation, on the obligation to give away whatever one is not using at that moment and on entitlement to benefit immediately from any perceived accumulation by one's associates. Even accumulation of products for trading purposes can be very difficult, especially if these are valued consumable items such as meat or honey.

I argue that generally in immediate-return systems these processes (and some other less crucial processes) 'disengage people from property, from the potentiality in property rights for creating dependency'. Of course, in the various immediate-return systems in different parts of the world the processes of disengagement are not identical, but the outcome is remarkably similar. Property rights of course exist, as we shall see, but are minimised in secular contexts. For members of these societies one might almost say that the notion of property as theft is not a novel revolutionary ideology but an implicit everyday view of the world.

Such property disengagement is associated with disengagement from binding commitments or dependencies in close social relationships, including close kinship and affinal relationships. A father cannot control his son's labour or the yield of his labour. A husband cannot control his wife's labour or the yield of her labour. Most important of all, a father cannot control his daughter's destination in marriage nor can a brother control his sister's destination. People interact closely and warmly with their kin and other associates all the time both in subsistence and non-subsistence activities, but they are not controlled by or dependent on them. Clans, lineages and other similar kinship groupings are either absent or else exist only in nominal shadowy form, apparently borrowed from outsiders and used for little more than to establish a measure of respectability in dealings with outsiders.

What we have in societies with immediate-return systems is a set of distinctive ways of handling property, or more specifically of disengaging from property, of limiting committed linkages between people and things, and a distinctive pattern of social relations which, taken together, form a surprisingly closely integrated whole. We can tell that they are closely integrated, closely bound together, both because they occur together in many different parts of the world and because of their extraordinary persistence and resilience in

changing ecological, economic and political circumstances even when they appear to be disadvantageous to the people involved. The evidence suggests that people find it exceptionally difficult, even intolerable, to give up or to limit their entitlement to share and equally difficult to accept the wealth or the authority or the superior status of any of their kin, their friends or other members of their own community. I think that it would be very hard to find well-documented instances of communities in societies with an immediate-return system that have in recent years changed their system of property relations and their system of social relations into ones in which a measure of wealth accumulation and kinship or household control over daily labour have become both generally accepted and effectively implemented."

A further interesting thing about this phenomenon is that it is not simply a political and economic one. Woodburn argues strongly that it also has necessary imaginal impetus:

"*In considering those factors which maintain immediate return and those which have the potential to change it, religion and ritual deserve particular attention. The notion that religion and ritual are secondary, are less important in understanding social continuity and social change than political and economic factors, still dominates a surprisingly wide range of approaches to the study of hunter-gatherer societies and should, I believe, be constantly challenged. Religion and ritual are not symbolic by-products of the real and the material but are active contexts for the maintenance and development of ideas and values, including those which relate to equality and inequality in social life. It seems strange to be still stressing this today, a century on from the work of Weber and Durkheim, but in the context of research on African hunter-gatherers this fundamental issue does still need emphasis. In my paper 'Sharing is not a Form of Exchange', I commented on the !Kung stress on sharing in their most important religious activity, the trance dance:*

'Men who go into trance expel illness, actual and potential, from the men, women and children of the community. A man pays no fees to the healers who teach him to become a healer, and when he is qualified he shares the yield of his ability to heal with everyone in his community without fee or expectation of reciprocation. His ability to heal is believed to derive from n/um, a personally owned substance or force within him which is said to be warmed up and made available for curing with the help of other dancers and singers. He shares n/um, or the yield of n/um, in a way that is directly analogous to the sharing of a personally owned carcase of a game animal he has killed.'

But I should go further than this. Sharing in this context is not merely analogous to the secular sharing of meat. It is consecrated sharing produced in the context of the joint participation of the entire community, a potent dramatisation of the production of the egalitarian community that has manifest appeal both to the reason and to the emotions of the participants. Its potency derives in part from its oppositional character: the shared unity of the participants in their joint opposition to the undifferentiated spirits of the dead, the bringers of illness and death. Sharing, equality and solidarity are commonly reinforced by opposition."

In a further essay, "Egalitarian Societies", which was the Malinowski Memorial Lecture for 1981 at the London School of Economics and published both in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* and elsewhere, Woodburn builds out this picture further, notably focusing on expressing the immediate-return hunter-gatherers' "egalitarian" ethos as something deliberate and purposeful. For example, his second paragraph is the following:

"*In these societies equalities of power, equalities of wealth and equalities of prestige or rank are not merely sought but are, with certain limited exceptions, genuinely realised. But, the evidence suggests, they are never unchallenged. People are well aware of the possibility that individuals or groups within their own egalitarian societies may try to acquire more wealth, to assert more power or to claim more status than other people, and are vigilant in seeking to prevent or to limit this. The verbal rhetoric of equality may or may not be elaborated but actions speak loudly: equality is repeatedly acted out, publicly demonstrated, in opposition to possible inequality.*"

The situation, we should imagine, is then never a stupidly naive one. Immediate-return hunter-gatherers are aware of the possibilities of inequality. In fact, it seems quite obvious that their awareness of such possibilities is what drives the performance of their actual polity. In other words, it seems a choice that they act in the ways that they do which are then ways formed in order to make the possible inequalities less possible. This is brought out by Woodburn in this presentation, in fact, in his distinction between immediate-return and delayed-return:

"*Delayed-return systems in all their variety (for almost all human societies are of this type) have basic implications for social relationships and social groupings: they depend for their effective operation on a set of ordered, differentiated, jurally-defined relationships through which crucial goods and services are transmitted. They imply binding commitments and dependencies between people. For an individual to secure the yield from his labour or to manage his assets, he depends on others. The farmer, for example, will almost invariably pool his labour with others-at least with a spouse and usually during the labour peaks of the agricultural cycle with several others-but, equally important, he depends on others for the protection of his growing crops, of his use rights to the land on which they are growing and*

of the yield when he obtains and stores it. While it would, in principle, be possible to imagine situations in which individuals on their own, invested substantial amounts of labour over time on their own, protected the asset in which the labour was invested on their own, and then secured and managed the yields on their own, in practice this seems almost never to occur."

Immediate-return hunter-gatherers are then people who can see the possible consequences of living by means of delayed-return but choose not to because these consequences they regard as undesirable for themselves. They are then engaging in the refusal of a certain, entirely possible, lifestyle and deliberately embracing another. How that is done is laid out by Woodburn programmatically as follows:

"*The social organisation of these societies has the following basic characteristics:*

1. Social groupings are flexible and constantly changing in composition.
2. Individuals have a choice of whom they associate with in residence, in the food quest, in trade and exchange, in ritual contexts.
3. People are not dependent on specific other people for access to basic requirements.
4. Relationships between people, whether relationships of kinship or other relationships, stress sharing and mutuality but do not involve long-term binding commitments and dependencies of the sort that are so familiar in delayed-return systems."

Woodburn can then highlight that "these societies systematically eliminate distinctions – other than those between the sexes – of wealth, of power, and of status." Even when it comes to sex, however, "normal relationships between men and women are quite variable in these societies, although in all of them women have far more independence than is

usual in delayed-return systems." It is in the detail, however, that we really see the mechanics of how this works:

1. "Nomadism is fundamental". This amounts to what the anarchist would call "freedom of association" or "voluntary association". Woodburn says: "in every case individuals have full rights of access to camps in several… areas and there is no question of tightly defined groups monopolising the resources of their areas and excluding outsiders. People can and do move from one camp to another and from one area to another, either temporarily or permanently and without economic penalty." In other words, "individual freedom of movement" is paramount and Woodburn draws the appropriate conclusion for authority here too: "such arrangements are subversive for the development of authority. Individuals are not bound to fixed areas, to fixed assets or to fixed resources. They are able to move away without difficulty and at a moment's notice from constraint which others may seek to impose on them and such possibility of movement is a powerful levelling mechanism, positively valued like other levelling mechanisms in these societies."

2. Relations not institutions. Immediate-return hunter-gatherer polities such as the Hadza of Tanzania with which Woodburn was particularly familiar are polities based on multiple small groupings of maybe one or two dozen people that occupy multiple camps dotted around a territory. Such a polity has no police force or indeed any institutions of any kind. All they have is relations with their kind to ensure their survival. Considering they live in the wild and exist by hunting and gathering it is virtually impossible to guard against being attacked or murdered should you offend someone else to the extent that they wish to hurt you. In addition, every male will have the tools of their existence (spears, possibly poisoned arrows, blades) and be used to killing with them. On this Woodburn comments:

"*In normal circumstances the possession by all men, however physically weak, cowardly, unskilled or socially inept, of the means to kill secretly anyone perceived as a threat to their own well-being not only limits predation and exploitation; it also acts directly as a powerful levelling mechanism. Inequalities of wealth, power and prestige are a potential source of envy and resentment and can be dangerous for holders where means of effective protection are lacking.*

What we have here is direct and immediate access to social control, access which is not mediated through formal institutions or through relationships with other people. It is directly analogous to, and matched by, the direct and immediate access, again not normally mediated through formal institutions or through relationships with other people, which people have to food and other resources."

In other words, such groups actively persist in avoiding creating the circumstances (such as inequality) in which people might be moved to violence against one another in the first place.

3. Access to human needs. A feature of these polities is that they absolutely insist on everyone having the right to basic human needs without qualification and regardless of which camp you happen to be in. This means, for example, "free and equal access to wild foods and water" and to the materials necessary to make shelters, tools, weapons, etc. Someone who has moved from another camp and so is a newcomer has the same rights. It would be a faux pas of the highest order to refuse anyone that which they have need of in this way. This is not even necessarily dependent on having taken part in a hunt or in the gathering activities. Woodburn emphasises:

"*What I want to stress here in this lack of dependence on specific others is the implication for authority and, most obviously, for domestic authority. The process of production is not in general controlled and directed by the household head or, if it is, the control is not authoritarian and is better described as limited co-ordination by consent. Indeed among the Hadza I would say there are no household heads. Older children and young unmarried adults in these societies are not dependent on the senior generation for access to property; to food or to resources though they may receive some property, food and resources from them. Among both Hadza and !Kung, children do relatively little work and what they do is done at their choice rather than under parental direction. Neither the parent-child nexus, nor the relationship between generations more generally, provides either a model or a training ground for relationships of authority and dependency; indeed they provide an alternative model for and training in personal decision-making and in the possibilities of self-reliance, in sharing but not dependency on sharing.*"

Woodburn can also distinguish this kind of polity from, say, an agricultural one:

"*Within the rather broad limits set by the optimal numbers for an efficient hunt, anyone who is present may participate according to his or her sex role and is entitled to a proportion of the yield. There is no commitment to participate and no basis for exclusion from participation. Each hunt is complete in itself and participation today apparently carries no obligation to participate tomorrow. This is fundamentally different from cooperation in any agricultural system where the members of the productive group are not an ad hoc aggregation but are a set of people bound by more enduring ties of kinship or of contract.*"

4. Sharing. It should seem obvious that even in polities that set out to be egalitarian the yield of the activity on an individual basis is never going to be precisely equal. Some may be more enthusiastic at hunting and gathering than others whilst it may simply be the case that some are more skilled, and so more successful, as well. There are also matters such as luck or capacity to work that are relevant in addition. All that being true, it is easy to see how inequalities could build up. Here the most obvious example is if a large game animal is killed which could obviously supply numerous helpings of food but it seems that these polities immediately act to disassociate the hunter from such a kill. Woodburn reports that "successful individual hunters are specifically denied the opportunity to make effective use of their kills to build wealth and prestige or to attract dependents." Hunters are not expected to be boastful about their kills and if they are the group will immediately ridicule them. Neither does the hunter get first pick of the meat or the choice cuts. (It is, of course, unthinkable that the hunter would keep the kill for himself.) Woodburn explains this attitude in the following way:

"*It has often been suggested that meat-sharing is simply a labour-saving form of storage. The hunter surrenders his rights to much of his kill in order to secure rights over parts of the kills of other hunters in future. There are problems with this formulation: as I have already mentioned, hunting success is unequal. Donors often remain on balance donors and may not receive anything like an equivalent return. Entitlement does not depend in any way on donation. Some men who are regular recipients never themselves contribute. Instead of seeing the arrangement as being in the interest of the donor, I think we should be clear that it is imposed on the donor by the community. Instead of seeing the transaction as a form of reciprocal exchange, I would suggest we treat it as analogous to taxation on incomes of the successful in our own society. The successful pay more than the less successful and are obliged to do so. They are not able to establish greater claims in future through having paid*

more tax and do not derive much prestige from having contributed more to the tax pool than they have withdrawn from it in benefits. The analogy may sound rather crude: certainly the hunter derives more prestige from contributing an animal than any taxpayer does from paying his taxes, but it does bring out the important fact that we are dealing here with a socially imposed levelling mechanism and not a mere practical convenience for the hunter.

Vegetable foods, which are less highly valued and which are obtained more easily and more predictably and in amounts which correspond more closely to the needs of the gatherers, are less widely shared but are not narrowly reserved for each gatherer and her immediate family. Among the Hadza it would be out of the question for a woman to hoard food while others are hungry. Sharing rights for pregnant women are particularly emphasised by the Hadza: they have the right to ask anyone for food at any time and are believed to be at risk if they are refused."

5. Against property. Like almost any people, immediate-return hunter-gatherers are familiar with the idea of personal possessions. They will all have clothes, tools, weapons, simple ornaments, pipes, etc. In the case of the three societies Woodburn discusses in this paper (the Hadza, the Mbuti and the !Kung) these are basically simple objects that can be made by most members of the society and so that require no ultra-specialised skills or equipment. They are then relatively easy to come by or to make or replace – and that is not unimportant. But he adds:

"*Everywhere we find that there are sanctions against accumulation. This cannot be explained, as so many writers have mistakenly suggested, simply in practical terms: nomadic people who have to carry everything they possess are concerned that their*

possessions should be readily portable so that they can be carried with ease when the time comes to move camp, but sanctions against accumulation go far beyond meeting this requirement and apply even to the lightest objects such as beads, arrowheads or supplies of arrow poison."

It seems that no one in such a community should suddenly find themselves in the position of being able to become a broker or to have surplus which might increase their status in the community. In this respect a game that is played, for example by Hadza men, becomes significant. This game is a game of random chance that, Woodburn reports, Hadza men engage in far more than they do in obtaining food and it involves a form of gambling. As Woodburn describes the game, it "involves tossing a handful of bark discs against a tree and reading the result which depends on which way up the various discs fall. Basically it is a game of chance and players have relatively little opportunity of influencing the result. Skill in throwing does play some part but the effect is reduced by banning the winner of the previous throw from acting as thrower next time." By such means the losers or winners of the game may exchange property (such as they have) between them. But not just anything may be wagered:

"*They gamble mainly for metal-headed hunting arrows, both poisoned and non-poisoned, but are also able to stake knives, axes, beads, smoking pipes, cloth and even occasionally a container of honey which can be used in trade. A few personally owned objects cannot be staked, because, Hadza say, they are not sufficiently valuable. These are a man's hunting bow, his non-poisoned arrows without metal heads used for hunting birds and small animals, and his leather bag used for carrying his pipes and tobacco, arrowheads and other odds and ends. Those objects excluded from gambling share two characteristics: first, they maintain a man's capacity to feed and protect himself and secondly, they are made from*

materials available in every part of the country. In contrast many of the objects used in gambling are made, at least in part, of materials not available in every part of the country. For example, poisoned arrows incorporate a head made from scrap metal obtained in trade from non-Hadza, poison which is made from the sap of one tree or the seeds of another which are local in their distribution and entirely absent from large areas of the country, and, if possible, a lightweight shaft of a particular species of shrub even more restricted in its range. Stone smoking pipes are made from a type of soapstone which is again only found in certain localities."

Woodburn mentions this game, which may otherwise seem as a strange curiosity, because it is "the major means by which scarce and local objects are circulated throughout the country." We can imagine how that works as individual Hadza move between camps (as they often seem to do given they have complete freedom of movement and the same rights in each). But, as a consequence:

"*[Such] circulation is accomplished, then, not through some form of exchange which would bind participants to one another in potentially unequal relationships of kinship or contract. The transactions are neutralised and depersonalised by being passed through the game. Even close kin and affines gamble with each other and the game acts against any development of one-way flows and dependency in relationships between them.*"

In other words, rather than other means of either trade or exchange that could appertain between such people, they choose to effectively randomise it through a game of chance. No one ever becomes a broker or someone who can base their existence on selling to those who don't have. No one can exclusivise or privatise the flow of goods. It works against, or at least constantly frustrates, the accumulation of personal wealth and the

idea of systematic accumulation. Woodburn reports that “its levelling effect is very powerful.” This is in addition to social pressures for anyone in such communities to give away any items for which they apparently have no immediate need and, Woodburn says, without any necessary expectation of return. This reminds me of the saying of Jesus of Nazareth recorded in the Gospel of Thomas 95: “If you have money, give it to someone from whom you won’t get it back.” That gospel was probably also elucidating a community’s particular ethos and is no less interesting for that fact. As a consequence of all this, Woodburn can generally summarise the immediate-return hunter-gatherer attitude to possession by saying that “people often seem to place surprisingly little value both on their own and on other people's possessions.”

6. Leadership and decision making. Woodburn begins here by saying “In these societies there are either no leaders at all or leaders who are very elaborately constrained to prevent them from exercising authority or using their influence to acquire wealth or prestige.” In addition, “Hadza decisions are essentially individual ones: even when matters such as the timing of a camp move or the choice of a new site are to be decided, there are no leaders whose responsibility it is to take the decisions or to guide people towards some general agreement.” Amongst the !Kung “personal qualities suggesting that a !Kung individual is ambitious for power or wealth exclude such a person from the possibility of leadership.” I am reminded here of some of the procedures and proclivities of the Golden Age pirates I have written about previously at length. In such groups the captain was a functionary chosen for his skill in leading and carrying out the collective enterprise rather than someone with an abstractly superior status. He was also someone who served the company at large and could be removed by them.

The six points above are general points in regard to the imagined egalitarian attitudes and practices of immediate-return hunter-gatherer polities. Woodburn thinks that, in practice, they add up to "a rigorously systematic principle":

"*in these societies the ability of individuals to attach and to detach themselves at will from groupings and from relationships, to resist the imposition of authority by force, to use resources freely without reference to other people, to share as equals in game meat brought into camp, to obtain personal possessions without entering into dependent relationships – all these bring about one central aspect of this specific form of egalitarianism.* ***What it above all does is to disengage people from property, from the potentiality in property rights for creating dependency.***" (emphasis his)

Woodburn interestingly then imagines this to be achievable in the specific context of hunting and gathering particularly because, as he observes, in any other sort of society such a disengagement from property "would damage the operation of the economy". But there is then the question of how we should view this. Is it a case of people who know what they want – or what they don't want? Is it a positive search for egalitarian living or a new conservatism? Woodburn can see both sides:

"*fluidity of local grouping and spatial mobility are remarkably resistant to change. They promote egalitarianism and greatly inhibit the development of both political centralisation and class stratification…*

I would argue that the nomadic hunting and gathering societies I have discussed are even more profoundly conservative. Fluidity of local grouping and spatial mobility, here combined with and reinforced by a set of distinctive egalitarian practices which disengage

people from property, inhibit not only political change but any form of intensification of the economy. There is no easy transition from non-competitive egalitarianism to competitive egalitarianism."

An interesting point here in relation to all this from Woodburn's previous paper "African hunter-gatherer social organization" is that he notes many currently (or recently) still existing immediate-return hunter-gatherer polities are what he terms "encapsulated" (that is, surrounded) by delayed-return agriculturalist or pastoralist communities much more closely aligned with civilisation. The point of this paper of Woodburn's is to question whether this fact leads to the immediate-return groups being or becoming immediate-return. That does not interest me for the purposes of this chapter but rather the relative attitudes of these groups does when the agriculturalists and pastoralists look down on and attempt to dominate the immediate-return hunter-gatherers. I quote now from Woodburn's paper at length:

"*In most sub-Saharan African countries there are, or were until recently, small groups (or subgroups) of people who either obtained their food largely by hunting and gathering or regarded themselves as descendants of people who had until recently obtained their food in this way. Such groups exist (or existed) in Mauritania, the Central African Republic, Gabon, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Congo, Zaire, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Tanzania, Angola, Zambia, Namibia, Botswana and South Africa and probably also in several of the other sub-Saharan African countries I have not mentioned. The majority of these groups are separated from each other by the much more numerous, and vastly more populous, groups of agricultural and pastoral peoples who are, and have long been, not just numerically, but also politically, dominant.*

They include: the many different equatorial forest groups who are referred to in the literature as Pygmies… and whom their neighbours call by such names as Mbuti, Mbute, Aka, Twa, Tuwa, Tswa or Chwa; the savannah groups rather further south, many of whom again are called by some variant of the term Twa; the many groups in Kenya and Tanzania whose neighbours call them by the Maasai term Ndorobo or Dorobo; the many groups in Botswana, Namibia and Angola who in the literature are usually called Bushmen or San; and again many other groups like the Hadza of Tanzania or the Kwegu of Ethiopia to whom no generalized term is usually applied.

Virtually all African hunter-gatherer groups are partly or totally surrounded by, and have rather frequent contacts with, the neighbouring pastoral and/or agricultural groups who divide them off from other hunter-gatherers (of whom they may have heard or of whom they may be totally unaware). I use 'encapsulation' to refer to this whole or partial enclosure or enclavement. The units thus encapsulated are very variable in size and their contacts with their neighbours are very variable in frequency: they range from one or two households separated from other similar groups by intervening farmers with whom they have daily contacts up to 'tribes' of a thousand or more people who may have an area of a thousand or more square miles more or less to themselves and who have only intermittent contacts with their farmer neighbours. In these latter cases, which are now extremely rare, perhaps even non-existent, but of which there were several in Africa only a few years ago, the term 'encapsulation' with its overtones of circumscription may seem inappropriate to us and would perhaps seem strange to the people involved if its meaning were to be explained to them. It might conflict with their sense of open horizons and freedom from constraint. The reality is that farmer neighbours are in most directions unlikely to be more than a long day's walk away and contact with them, for all its variation, is likely to be significant and to be seen by the people themselves as important.

The type and intensity of the pressures applied by the encapsulating groups were in some respects similar throughout Africa and in other respects rather variable. Reading through the literature, I have been particularly struck by a similarity. The encapsulating groups did not merely assert their political dominance over the hunter-gatherers and ex-hunter-gatherers they encapsulated; they also treated them as inferiors, as people apart, stigmatized them and discriminated against them. But at the same time they regarded them as possessing certain powers often linked with the notion that they were the original inhabitants of the country. The stereotypes that are held by the encapsulating groups are politically potent and colour the whole range of interactions between them and the hunter-gatherers they encapsulate. These points are best discussed by referring to specific instances and I shall look in turn at three different East African cases: the Hadza of northern Tanzania, the Okiek (Highland Dorobo) of central Kenya and the Mbuti of Zaire.

The Eastern Hadza live in an area of around 1000 square miles of bush to the east of Lake Eyasi in northern Tanzania. These days a proportion of them live in government settlements but the number of residents in the settlements varies depending mainly on the availability of food and other goods which the government provides at any particular time. Most of the remainder live by hunting and gathering in nomadic bush camps although a few have taken up residence in the settlements of neighbouring farmers. What is unusual about the Hadza situation is the variety of different neighbours they can contact if they choose. To the south are the Isanzu, sedentary Bantu-speaking agriculturalists. To the east and north-east are the Iraqw or Mbulu, sedentary Cushitic-speaking mixed farmers. Within Hadza country and to the east and south-east are the Barabaig, who are nomadic pastoralists. Also within Hadza country are two substantial tribally mixed villages, Yaida and Mangola, which contain members of these three and many other groups. Interestingly the views all these

various groups hold about the Hadza are rather similar; the same stereotypes constantly recur.

The view that is most often put even when Hadza are present is that the Hadza are not a 'real' ethnic group but are an aggregation of people who, recently or in the past, fled from neighbouring societies into the bush for a variety of reasons — to avoid famine, to avoid punishment for some crime or because they had been ostracized, to avoid paying the head tax levied by the colonial authorities on all groups in the area apart from the Hadza. Nowadays the idea that they are victims of colonialism, people who were forced out into the bush by the actions of the colonial authorities, has some currency. Their click language is, I was once told by a neighbouring tribesman, not a real language but a cacophonous creole bastardized from neighbouring languages and using animal-like sounds. Loan words in Hadza, heard in Hadza conversations, were triumphantly produced as evidence that Hadza is not a language in its own right.

The Hadza are, or were, also sometimes treated as being themselves almost animal-like, partly perhaps because they live in the bush, an unacceptable place associated with animals. The daughter of one of my elderly Hadza friends had married an Iraqw farmer. This farmer, annoyed about something, came with farmer friends and gave his Hadza father-in-law a serious beating. I persuaded the Hadza to seek damages for his injuries in an Iraqw tribal court (this was in 1958 or 1959). At the court one of the Iraqw court elders said, to my astonishment, that Hadza were like baboons but if you married one you had to treat your wife's father properly. Some other Iraqw elders seemed very doubtful about whether a Hadza had any right, even in these circumstances, to claim against an Iraqw. Damages were, in the end, awarded but I know of no other case in which a Hadza managed to secure damages in an Iraqw court.

The fact that some of the foods the Hadza eat are regarded as disgusting and unacceptable as food to some or all of the neighbouring farmers is sometimes mentioned. Hyrax, baboon, vulture (eaten by some Hadza) and tortoise (eaten by Hadza women) fall into this category. More emphasis is placed on the claim that Hadza eat meat raw and that they are impolite and greedy in the way that they eat. In these and other respects they are seen as violating acceptable behaviour. They are much criticized for their begging and their supposedly child-like lack of attention to wealth and property. They are seen as poverty-stricken and their poverty is often said to be their own fault. However, nowadays they are sometimes treated by government officials as victims rather than as improvident poor and as appropriate recipients for government development aid.

Another theme that constantly recurs is the notion that the Hadza are mysterious, that they have special knowledge of secret medicines (especially anti-snakebite medicine) and that they have extraordinary supernatural powers (in particular the power of making themselves invisible). The Hadza are relatively few in number and only rarely venture outside their own country so that many people living within a few miles of them have never actually seen them. There is much speculative talk about them.

Like many other ethnic stereotypes, this composite one that I have outlined is almost wholly false. The Hadza have a rather clear and distinctive ethnic identity and speak a language which is unrelated to neighbouring languages and is in no sense a creole. The five hundred detailed genealogies that I have compiled and the genetic studies carried out by a physical anthropologist, Nigel Barnicot, with whom I worked in the 1960s, demonstrate conclusively that immigration during the past hundred years — and probably for much longer than that — has occurred on a very small scale except during a period of a few years early this century when harsh actions by the German colonial authorities and a series of famines did

briefly cause a number of Isanzu farmers to come to live in the bush by hunting and gathering. Most are said to have lived apart from the Hadza and soon returned to Isanzu. Some lived with the Hadza and a number of these, almost all men, married Hadza spouses. Many young Hadza today have one of these immigrants among their ancestors. Erich Obst, who in 1911 was the first European to make contact with the Hadza, met several of these immigrants and I met one or two survivors when I started my research in 1957. The number of more recent immigrants is very small indeed. Usually they only stay if they are of part-Hadza ancestry, for example the children of women who have married out. There is nothing to suggest that the proportion of immigrants is any higher than it usually is in Africa between adjacent farming communities. Even the hungry are reluctant to live for longer than is necessary with a mysterious and stigmatized group.

Though there are foods which the Hadza eat which their neighbours reject, there are also foods — notably milk — eaten by neighbours which the Hadza traditionally rejected. The Hadza may eat liver raw — as some of their neighbours do — but they do not, in general, eat other meat raw. The claim that their food use is disgusting is just as ethnocentric as such claims usually are.

The Hadza are not impoverished. They obtain their food with relative ease and famine is unknown. Surveys in which I participated in the 1960s demonstrated that malnutrition almost never occurs. They are poor only in the sense that they do not accumulate property — domestic animals, stores of food, stores of artefacts of the sort that their neighbours do. They trade on their reputation as mysterious people in their dealings with outsiders, and especially in their sales of herbal medicines. But, for the most part, they do not place much faith themselves in the medicines which they sell. They certainly do not believe that other Hadza can make themselves invisible!

Why then are these false stereotypes held? They express, first, the power situation. The Hadza are manifestly politically weak in relation to their neighbours. They have neither the numbers nor the organization to be able to assert themselves politically. Their relative political impotence labels them as inferiors. At the same time nomadic hunting and gathering as a way of life does offer so many patterned contrasts to the cherished values of successful farmers that it is readily represented as alien and unintelligible: for farmers it simply cannot be a 'real' coherent way of life at all and must be a bastardized form. Now who would live an inferior, bastardized way of life? Two categories of people offer themselves in the amazing world of ethnic stereotype construction. Either people who are themselves perceived as intrinsically inferior, or else outcasts from other groups who have no choice in the matter. Some of the neighbours of the Hadza undoubtedly do think of them as intrinsically inferior but the preferred explanation of these neighbours is perhaps the more generous one — that they are outcasts or outlaws who are living as they do because other choices have been denied them and who are at least potentially capable of redeeming themselves and living as these farmers believe human beings ought to live. On the other hand, this latter stereotype is ungenerous in denying them priority as the first inhabitants of the area.

Neighbours, even those who have dealings with the Hadza, are quite extraordinarily ignorant about them and this is certainly in part related to the barriers to communication that are imposed by the social distance they create between themselves and the Hadza. Outsiders, sometimes even long-standing immigrants into Hadza society, do not learn to speak or to understand Hadza. They expect the Hadza to learn their languages. Nor do they usually take much trouble to find out about Hadza custom — that would be treating the Hadza too seriously. It is wholly consistent that in this vacuum they attribute mysterious, unintelligible supernatural powers to the Hadza…

Recent accounts of the Okiek, hunters and gatherers of the Mau forests of Kenya, show that they too are stigmatized as fundamentally inferior by many of their neighbours. They too are regarded as monkey-like and there is even a widespread belief that they have tails. They too are falsely accused of eating their meat raw. Their immediate neighbours include the pastoral Maasai. In a version of the Maasai origin myth cited by Blackburn, an Okiot man annoyed God by his profligate behaviour and as a result no more cattle were lowered from heaven. This denied Maasai more cattle. At the same time God condemned the Okiek to live from then onwards only from wild rather than domestic animals. Both the Okiek way of life and the Maasai shortage of cattle are thus represented as imposed by God as a punishment for Okiek misbehaviour. Even today the Maasai regard the Okiek as profligate and gluttonous because they often obtain cattle for slaughter and immediate consumption rather than to build up a herd. Their relative lack of cattle indicates, the Maasai believe, their poverty and their improvidence, their lack of ability to develop and care for possessions. Their consumption of game meat and of the meat of cattle that die of disease further condemns them. At the same time they are said to have no sense of respect or of honour and to lose their tempers and become violent among themselves in a shameful way.

Like the Hadza in relation to their neighbours, the Okiek lack political power in their relations with the Maasai. Their perceived impotence is again translated into inferiority and in this case the inferiority is made additionally humiliating by being represented as a consequence of their own failings, their ancestral and present-day profligacy. Blackburn labels as a gross misconception the notion put forward by unspecified outsiders that the Okiek are merely a conglomeration of criminals and runaways from other tribes, a similar stereotype to the one applied to the Hadza which I have discussed and sought to explain above. No doubt some similar explanation would be appropriate here. The Maasai are not well informed about the Okiek. Blackburn tells us that Okiek life is a mystery to them and that they feel there is something mysterious and unknowable about the Okiek. Again there

are obvious parallels with the stereotypes applied to the Hadza and similar explanations may be relevant…

In the published literature on East African hunter-gatherers the term 'Dorobo' constantly appears. The term is used by the pastoral Maasai, and by writers who obtained their information from the Maasai and other people in the same area, for the very wide range of different hunters with whom they had contacts. It covers both those Maasai who have temporarily lost their cattle and who are forced to live by hunting until they can accumulate more, and hunting and gathering groups like the Okiek (and even occasionally the Hadza, though the Maasai today have scarcely any contact with them) who have distinctive cultures and languages, who have long occupied particular areas and who have apparently accepted relatively few in-marrying or other immigrants whether these immigrants are impoverished pastoralists or not. There has been a spate of recent articles suggesting that the Dorobo in general are best treated as impoverished pastoralists living only temporarily as hunter-gatherers until they can acquire stock. While undoubtedly there are some Dorobo of this sort, we must beware of generalizing from these instances and taking the highly prejudiced ethnic stereotypes of the Maasai and other peoples at their face value when they deny cultural integrity to societies they despise and fail to understand. My own guess is that, in spite of their political weakness, indeed perhaps partly because of it and the stigmatization associated with it, most East African hunter-gatherer groups display at least as much stability and continuity of ethnic self-identification as do East African agricultural and pastoral societies. As Kratz points out, clear ethnic self-identification is for the Okiek combined with an ability to pass comfortably between cultures, to speak in the languages and interact in the cultures of their neighbours as well as in their own. The Hadza, too, have this skill and I would expect it to be widespread among low-status groups. This may be

confusing for higher-status groups (and sometimes for anthropologists) but it must not be taken as an indication that such hunter-gatherers do not have a culture of their own.

The Mbuti, too, are stigmatized by their villager neighbours, as both Turnbull's material and some interesting new material presented by Waehle at a conference I attended in Cologne in January 1985, reveal. We are told that the Mbuti are labelled by villagers as savages, even sub-human (as being like chimpanzees or forest hogs), as associated with the uncivilised forest, as unreliable and as ignorant. Here the emphasis appears to be on intrinsic inferiority rather than inferiority as outcasts — which is, I suppose, what one might expect given the striking physical differences between Mbuti and villager which the villagers' stereotype can hardly ignore. Yet at the same time their forest skills are recognized and they are said to have originally taught villagers how to live in the forest. Turnbull tells us that the Mbuti are recognized as the original inhabitants of the forest and are 'to a certain extent, feared and respected as such by the villager'.

Maquet tells us that the Twa of Rwanda are said, half- jokingly, by most other Rwandans, to be more akin to monkeys than to human beings. The socially emphasized physical stereotype for a Twa is, he tells us, one that 'stressed all the features which could be interpreted as ape-like' — bulging forehead, flat face and nose, and so on. Only the Twa eat game meat, which is another reason why they are despised by the rest of the population. Twa are regarded as naturally gluttonous and lacking in restraint, but as loyal to their masters and courageous in hunting.

One could go on and on. Rather similar stereotypes are, or were in the past, applied by agricultural and pastoralist neighbours to San in southern Africa and, I think, more generally to hunter-gatherers all over sub-Saharan Africa."

I have quoted Woodburn here at length and could be accused of being indulgent in doing so. Yet it simply fascinates me that various immediate-return hunter-gatherer peoples, written about in Western anthropology as startlingly and deliberately egalitarian, are, instead, regarded by their own agriculturalist and pastoralist neighbours as disgusting and offensive wild animals (monkeys, hogs) who engage in wild and uncivilised practices and are regarded as the flotsam and jetsam of the world. In a Western context the descriptions of them would be regarded as nothing other than ethnocentric and bigoted racism (and, should these reports be believed, seem equally as based in near ignorance of those they set out to describe). But it does make the point rather sharply that how groups like the Hadza or the Mbuti are still living seems feral, barbarous and uncultured *even to their own neighbours*. Those even slightly more sedentary and civilised seem to quite easily take offence at them and the fact that they even live apparently wild in such a way. It is repeatedly said that such people are "politically weak" as a result but this seems to be the case when judged in a more geo-political sense (given that even all Africa is now parcelled out, often by former colonial European powers, into nation states that bear no resemblance to past native hunting grounds or territories). The fact that most people historically became convinced to become more sedentary and agricultural/pastoral, on the basis of delayed-return living, has worked against those who remain attached to the more egalitarian version of the nomadic hunter-gatherer life.

This brings us to Davids Graeber and Wengrow and their recent book *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (hereafter G+W and TDOE respectively). This is a book I have interacted with (often positively, so far) in my previous writing not least because David Graeber was known to me as an intelligent anarchist and anthropologist

with something to say. So I have commented previously on how TDOE is a book about the question “How did we get stuck?” (the “we” here being human civilisation considered in the round) in our modern political iteration after starting off being a book about telling us why “the origins of inequality” was a wrong line of enquiry to go down in terms of an appraisal of human historical development. In those past remarks I interacted with the book largely as an uninformed layperson. They were basically straight takes from the position I was in and as I saw things. This time is to be different, however, for now I have taken some time to read some anthropology and so gotten my hands dirtier in the cut and thrust of anthropological opinion (which includes reading numerous papers by professionals who have reviewed or critiqued TDOE itself). It is to be hoped my updated position is more informed as a consequence.

TDOE does not start out very promisingly. Its first two sentences are:

“*Most of human history is irreparably lost to us. Our species, Homo sapiens, has existed for at least 200,000 years, but for most of that time we have next to no idea what was happening.*”

Great. So what hope of a “new history of humanity” then? It soon becomes apparent, however, that at least part of the running motivation for writing TDOE is G+W’s dissatisfaction with numerous “myths” (their seemingly preferred term) that have grown up around human beings and their (pre-)history that they want to possibly dispel but at least counter. This begins in a basic choice between Rousseau’s “we used to be good (and equal!) but then civilisation came along and we fell into a horrifying descent” and Hobbes’ “humans are all selfish, will inevitably fight and lead miserable lives so they need a boss to control them”. In contradiction of both of these “myths” G+W want to offer what is

basically their own myth: humanity the species of “bold social experiments”. Its true, G+W do want to think of human beings as that but the more you read TDOE (or, at least, the more I do) the more it comes to seem as if TDOE is basically an apologetic for civilisation itself (and so not about “the dawn of everything” at all. Its more about how we could make civilisation better, if anything). To be sure, this is an appropriately moral and politically tweaked version of the same. But the point is G+W do not like the idea that there were, for example, egalitarian hunter-gatherers in our past who teach us something about ourselves we should take to heart. In fact, they go in on trying to embarrass those who think so. They compare such ideas to the Garden of Eden and, more especially, an Edenic innocence they see not as inspiring but as depressing (because it might mean we have to be like that and not the civilisational beings we became). In the end, G+W come across to me as two middle class academics with thriving careers who enjoy the cultural trappings (they might call them “complexities”) of “civilisation” and would quite like to keep them, thank you very much. If this leaves us with huge social and political problems as a result (because what else is providing for 8 billion people and rising in that way going to do?) well I guess we’ll just have to do our best.

This reminds me of someone: Murray Bookchin. He too insisted that we had to keep cities going at all costs and he too tied it to a vision he had of the human being as rational and cultured (and appropriately modern). Are we by this meant to understand that hunter-gatherers are neither rational nor cultured (nor modern), a negative assessment? G+W know of Bookchin and even use one of his book titles as one of their chapter headings. Graeber, too, has praised Bookchin as one inspired by the Rojava social experiment (which was at least indirectly inspired by Bookchin’s own ideas through Abdullah Öcalan). So G+W, like Bookchin, take a tack of seemingly wanting to dismiss those who have more seemingly and naively primitive inspirations. They put their trust in human rationality and

ability to create and invent and play. This is all very well. But what does it have to do with human origins? Is it really telling us anything substantial about ourselves, let alone our pre-history and what made us who we became? The following, for example, could have been written by the vituperative Bookchin himself:

"*The ultimate effect of all these stories about an original state of innocence and equality, like the use of the term 'inequality' itself, is to make wistful pessimism about the human condition seem like common sense: the natural result of viewing ourselves through history's broad lens. Yes, living in a truly egalitarian society might be possible if you're a Pygmy or a Kalahari Bushman. But if you want to create a society of true equality today, you're going to have to figure out a way to go back to becoming tiny bands of foragers again with no significant personal property. Since foragers require a pretty extensive territory to forage in, this would mean having to reduce the world's population by something like 99.9 per cent. Otherwise, the best we can hope for is to adjust the size of the boot that will forever be stomping on our faces; or, perhaps, to wangle a bit more wiggle room in which some of us can temporarily duck out of its way.*"

The point of this, it seems to me, is apparently to say (as Bookchin himself said) that civilisation is the only way for it is manifestly obvious no one is recommending mass genocide to make the world better for the survivors. (This appears to be the plot of a Marvel saga in fact if I have the motivations of Thanos correct.) But that seems rather like trying to drive the sheep into a pre-constructed pen for me. There may be no "Garden of Eden" but neither must people relate to each other in civilisational, state-ordained ways either. (In fact, there are still those who don't since the forces of civilisation have still not yet quite managed to wipe out ALL of the "primitives" which is why anthropologists have focused so much on African hunter-gatherers that still exist.) But then again, its no

either/or. G+W themselves never stop talking about humanity's endless ability to create and how "there is no single pattern". Then why can't these Graeberian and Wengrowian humans create a "not civilisation" form of living as an alternative to the civilisational hellscape? Why, in fact, can't they do what the hell they like (just, in fact, as G+W insist they used to be able to and maybe should be able to again)? This has got nothing to do with locating an "original human society" and copying that and, by the way, is there anyone even suggesting that anyway? So G+W may sarcastically refer to there being no "original" form of society in order to debunk what they call "myths" but if you want to talk about "origins" that's not really even the point anyway. It seems clear (to me at least) that instead all that rhetoric is simply about saying that we have to get on with the business of civilisation because civilisation (appropriately arranged!) is their preferred way. (In an edition of the academic journal *Hunter Gatherer Research* that focuses on TDOE James M Van Lanen gets this point across by calling his essay "'Cancelling' hunter-gatherers for the cause of twenty-first century urbanism" – an appropriately Bookchinian desire if one recalls how Bookchin dismissed the primitives and their cheerleaders too!)

I don't think civilisation is the way, however (for it is a prison and, in my mind, can't ever really help being one – especially given how far into the penitentiary mindset we have gone now. At some not too distant future point it now seems feasible to believe that I will have to age verify myself on my own computer just to satisfy some government's impudent and authoritarian need to know my identity so I can even continue writing my book and backing the text up online). I think "egalitarianism" might be the way though – and I think that requires societal open heart surgery and bold courage to live differently rather than G+W's tinkering endless play which always seems to end up wanting to be forms of benevolent modern civilisation. And so, like several others, I focus on those who seem to privilege that.

Which brings us back to those hunter-gatherers G+W are so desperate for us to forget. Other anthropologists, particularly those connected with the Radical Anthropology Group at UCL London (Chris Knight, Camilla Power, Ian Watts, Jerome Lewis, Morna Finnegan), think there is much we can learn from such people – which also doubles as much we can learn about actual human origins too (because it is much more realistically about human origins than anything TDOE has to say). The Radical Anthropology Group are cognisant of Woodburn's work with hunter-gatherers too but unlike G+W they do not discuss it merely to dismiss it as depressing and discouraging. In fact one of the scholars I just named actually said to me in a social media message that Wengrow and Graeber could learn a lot from hunter-gatherers if only they hadn't dismissed them (presumably as some version of the primitive uncivilised whose time has passed) so easily.

And so I come, first of all, to the work of Camilla Power whose essay in that same edition of *Hunter Gatherer Research* which critiques TDOE (she also edits the edition with Chris Knight) proclaims that "Egalitarianism made us the symbolic species". Here is serious work that aims to interact with hunter-gatherers (G+W never really want to do this), and their putative pre-history, based on things other than the odd "skulls and bits of knapped flint" G+W dismiss as the only evidence for anything anymore. Power here particularly wants to criticise the notion (as others do to) that the egalitarian social orders hunter-gatherers form, have formed and putatively could have been forming (as part of a much wider diversity of socialities) for tens of thousands of years, are either "simple" or "childlike" or "innocent" as G+W contend. Power charges that "Graeber and Wengrow never fully consider the complex reality of maintaining an egalitarian political balance" and that may be correct when much of their book is given over to highlighting several of the "civilised" ways people have lived as a sort of demonstration of their thesis that such variety and

back and forth was the norm. But in a way Power (together with those of the Radical Anthropology Group to be sure) hoists G+W by their own petard for she points out:

"*In human history there have been no social experiments bolder or more original than language and symbolic culture. In this article, I ask: what if these boldest of all social experiments by our ancestors – our African ancestors of H. sapiens – in fact constrained the political possibilities? What if only certain kinds of political arrangements could have enabled language and symbolism to emerge? Where would that leave Graeber and Wengrow on the 'infantilising' effects of imagining egalitarian ancestry?*"

This is a fascinating tack and is to ask a question G+W don't seem to ask at all (stuck, as they are, with skulls and bits of knapped flint), i.e. under what conditions could we become language inventors and language users (as we obviously did) at all? It is the contention of the Radical Anthropology Group generally, and here Power specifically, that this requires basically egalitarian conditions and that, far from being "simple", such egalitarianism is actually a sophisticated and complex social technology in its own right. (Camilla Power has also confirmed this to me in a personal communication on social media when I asked her about it. She replied that "the ancestors of everyone alive today were strong tendency egalitarian or they would not have had operative language".) It is, in other words, one of humanity's most noted social and cultural achievements, one that completely changed what we are and how we exist. However, G+W, Power notes, try to obfuscate about egalitarianism by saying no one even really seems to know what it is ("As we have repeatedly observed," say G+W in chapter 4 of TDOE, "'inequality' is a slippery term, so slippery, in fact, that it's not entirely clear what the term 'egalitarian society' should even mean"). But Power, who writes that "Striking the balance between autonomy

and interdependency is what gives egalitarianism its complex, fluid dynamic", points out that James Woodburn seems to have known what he meant by using the term:

"*I have chosen to use the term 'egalitarian' to describe these societies of near-equals because the term directly suggests that the 'equality' that's present is not neutral, the mere absence of inequality of hierarchy, but is asserted.*" (James Woodburn, "Egalitarian Societies")

So this is not some random reality that somehow appears out of nowhere. It is deliberately created, a cultural invention. It is not something which just happens to happen but is something that is positively and deliberately maintained. In evolutionary terms (for Power and the Radical Anthropology Group are committed Darwinians in exactly a way G+W are not) this plugs into the notion that a "Machiavellian intelligence" is at work in the complex interactions of social groups which gives advantage to those who become more adept at cooperation and so more adept at "negotiating alliances". Power can then connect "increasing brain sizes" from monkeys to apes to hominins with the "increasing political complexity and ability to exploit alliances". The inventors of the idea of "Machiavellian intelligence", Andrew Whiten and David Erdal, offer "an evolutionary and dialectical explanation for human egalitarianism" which they term "counter-dominance". It is explained by Power like this:

"*At a certain point, the ability to operate within alliances exceeds the ability of any single individual, no matter how strong, to dominate others. If the dominant tries, he (assuming 'he' for the moment) will meet an alliance in resistance who together can deal with him. Once that point is reached, the sensible strategy becomes not to try to dominate others, but to use alliances to resist being dominated oneself.*"

Power asserts that this idea "predicts much of what we find" with egalitarian hunter-gatherers. (Not all are egalitarian by the way. No one is assuming here that one description describes all and in her communication with me Power allows those "with more tendency of dominance relations, particularly gender wise" could have co-existed for a while in our "Middle Pleistocene" past with the egalitarians too – yet without becoming our ancestors.) But she also notes that G+W choose not to interact with either the idea or its theorists as in fact they generally don't where evolutionary arguments are presented that they would prefer to simply ignore. Power however, now remarking on the work of Christopher Boehm (whom G+W do mention – but only to dismiss him as pushing naive and "odd" simplicities that send us back to the Garden of Eden), remarks that:

"*Boehm's model (2001) argues for a group or collective intention rather than individualistic negotiations. Because humans descend from great apes, says Boehm, our distant ancestors must have been psychologically adapted to great ape politics of dominance, violence and resistance. But in our lineage, collective resistance culminated in everyone ganging up to prevent any would-be leader from dominating the group. Chimpanzee-style dominance was overturned by solidarity action from below, resulting in 'reverse dominance' – rule by a morally aware community, consciously determined to maintain equality.*"

Of this Power notes that:

"*Both models – Erdal and Whiten's 'counter-dominance' and Boehm's 'reverse dominance' – capture aspects of existing hunter-gatherer politics. While Erdal and Whiten provide evolutionary continuity of 'Machiavellian' individualistic and autonomous strategies,*

Boehm's reverse dominance engages with 'revolutionary' moral and collectively determined ones."

Power also brings evidence from our bodies though, specifically our "cooperative eyes" and "large brains". In evolution I suppose the thought is that everything happens (or, rather, succeeds) for a pragmatic reason (this being that it worked!). So why these things? In the first case of "cooperative eyes" Power says:

"*Alone of over 200 primate species, we have evolved eyes with an elongated shape and a bright white sclera background to a dark iris. Known as 'cooperative eyes', they invite anyone we interact with to see easily what we are looking at. By contrast, great apes have relatively round, dark eyes, making it more difficult to judge their gaze direction.*"

Power comments on this that "Our eyes appear adapted for mutual mind-reading, also known as intersubjectivity; our closest primate relatives more or less block this off." The explanation she finds most convincing in regard to this is Sarah Hrdy's in *Mothers and Others* which discourses at length about "collective child care" in human societies of a type also practised by African hunter-gatherers. Such childcare is not found among other great ape species and so is a human development. As Power then continues:

"*As babies needed to attract and hold the attention of various carers, they developed acute sensitivity to the moods, emotions and intentions of those carers, needing to read their faces, expressions and gaze direction. At the same time, they became increasingly expressive of their own feelings and emotions to engage carers. This clears the pathway of mutuality in mind-reading – where a purely Machiavellian stance would only go one way. It*

fosters meshing of emotional states, grasping how you look to the other, and ultimately sharing of intentions based in mechanisms like reading eye-gaze."

Which brings us to "large brains" which also has to do with mothers and child care. Humans have much larger brains than the other great apes. The reason appears to be dependent on nutrition and how much energy you can get in the body since brains are very energy hungry. Now if you are an ape who has to feed its offspring alone you can only do so much. What you put in will hard limit what can develop. The suggestion is that with some ancient (and egalitarian) human ancestor cooperative childcare became a thing and this allowed offspring to be better fed and so have greater developmental properties, particularly in terms of the brain. As Power then puts it:

"*Prosociality, social tolerance, and aversion to inequity on behalf of others, not just self, fostered by cooperative childcare, would have enabled brain expansion and launched the human career of cumulative cultural transmission… Because they required reliable transfers of energy from others to mothers with offspring, increasing brain sizes could only have been favoured in social conditions of reduced tendency to dominance and greater egalitarianism…*

Brains could only expand as materially more energy was channelled to females and their offspring. This again implies gendering of the strategies that enabled this to happen. Male dominance, harassment and strategic control of females… would have obstructed such unprecedented increases of brain size. Those populations where male dominance, sexual conflict and infanticide risks remained high were least likely to become our ancestors. Instead, our forebears solved the problem of great ape male dominance, harnessing males into routine support of these extraordinarily large-brained offspring.

Among the mechanisms by which mothers gained energy, by recruiting male help, women have evolved a sexual physiology that is levelling and time-wasting. Their reproductive signals do not favour males who want to identify fertile females, monopolise the fertile moment and then move on to the next one – a classic strategy for dominant male apes. Concealed and unpredictable ovulation combined with continuous sexual receptivity through almost the whole cycle makes it hard for males to track periods of female fertility. A would-be dominant male trying to guard more than one female wastes time guessing about the possible fertility of any cycling female. Guarding her, he misses other opportunities, and other males will be attending to those other sexually receptive females. Continuous sexual receptivity spreads the reproductive opportunities around many males, and hence is levelling from an evolutionary perspective…"

We will come back to this later but now we must go on to ask about the evolutionary emergence of language. Here Power notes Graeber's own assertion in his 2011 book *Debt: The First 5000 Years* that "Conversation is a domain particularly disposed to communism" but she herself wishes to push further:

"*Language as the mutual exploration of each other's minds requires nonviolent safe space and time to be able to work… Conversation as a necessarily consensual process expresses the quintessential opposite of relations of dominance. It relies on the ultimate in intersubjective ability to look through the eyes of the other.* ***A fundamentally egalitarian matrix is the only possible ground for the evolution of language.***" (emphasis mine)

In short, if you live in a context where no one can tell you what to do (or force you to do it regardless) then you have to somehow achieve agreement and consensus. In other words, you have to symbolically engage with each other which requires the development of

communication skills and symbolic thought. Power suggests that "It would require a prolonged phase of relative egalitarianism to be established" and goes on to conclude that:

"*This constraint refutes the idea that egalitarian origins is 'a myth' implying 'primitive simplicity'. The evolution of each one of these human features is predicated on sophisticated strategies for undermining and periodically neutralising dominance relations.*"

At this point I switch ponies and Camilla Power is joined by her colleagues Ian Watts and Chris Knight in the cooperative essay "The Symbolic Revolution: A Sexual Conflict Model" from the *Oxford Handbook of Symbolic Evolution*. This essay is basically telling a similar story but it gets to the heart of the sexual nature of this more than Power's essay alone does. First, however, we may note that:

"*A widely held view is that language and symbolism require unprecedented levels of trust and cooperation to evolve in a population. Specifically, it has been argued that group members had to exhibit what is known as 'we'-intentionality, such that meanings exist for 'us' as a stable collective. The 'basic thing about linguistic symbols is that they are intersubjective . . . meaning that they are comprehended and understood in the context of self-other equivalence'. Because self-other equivalence would not be fostered under conditions of dominance and subordination, or typical primate hierarchy, this suggests that the human symbolic revolution was part of a wider social revolutionary overthrow of dominance and hierarchy in general.*"

When it comes to evolutionary talk everything appears to be about sex. We start hearing about "competition for females" and "sexual selection" and suchlike. So how do you

control all this as a coherent polity if, as is posited of the hunter-gatherers such as Woodburn's "immediate-return" variety, no one is in charge? What, in other words, happens to maintain egalitarianism in these communities? One solution is the counter-dominance and reverse dominance already mentioned allied with the cooperative features of Machiavellian intelligence that developed and became valuable because they were advantageous. But keeping this now in a hunter-gatherer context specifically we can go further. Going back to the "bigger brains" discussion we can ask how the nutrition necessary is provided for – and who provides it. Power, Watts and Knight now say:

"*As female reproductive costs increased with the maximization of Homo brain sizes, those females who gained more reliable male support would have improved their fertility rates and reduced infant mortality. We argue that, for our ancestors in this period, the most socially and cognitively demanding challenge requiring systemic resolution would have been to secure reliable male investment and coordinate resource exchange and distribution between the sexes and their respective kin. We hypothesize that novel signalling strategies arose to enforce a configuration of bride-service. Typically found among African and other immediate-return foragers, in bride-service societies male sexual access depends on success in provisioning. Bride-service associates strongly with a tendency to matrilocal residence, especially among African hunter-gatherers. Support from a woman's kin obliges hunters to surrender whatever game they catch to the bride's family. This is an effective mechanism of redistribution, making it difficult for men to assert dominance by monopolizing the distribution of food.*

The social context for reverse dominance strategies was female kin coalitions. The specific target of these strategies would be dominant males who attempted to monopolise fertile females but refused to do bride-service. Note here that among males, relatives of the

females (brothers, mother's brothers), and those who were willing investors all share strong interest in supporting female strategies against non-cooperative, dominant males. We therefore have a potential coalition of the whole community asserting moral behavior, as envisaged by Boehm. The occasion for reverse dominant coalitionary action would be when alpha males attempted to sequester any potentially fertile female."

In order to make this idea more coherent these anthropologists (beginning with Chris Knight in 1991 and his landmark study *Blood Relations: Menstruation and the Origins of Culture*) have come up with what they call the "Female Cosmetic Coalitions (FCC) model" to explain it. It is concerned with giving substance to the reverse dominance ideal and describing the reality of collective female strategic resistance to sexually interested dominant males who merely want to have a good time but not invest in the consequences. In the process it also goes on to help maintain egalitarian social relations. It is explained by Power, Watts and Knight here like this:

"*With estrus phased out during human evolution, menstruation was left as the most salient cue indicating to males that a female was imminently fertile. A dominant male strategy would evolve to target and guard menstrual females, monopolizing matings until that female had ceased to cycle and was pregnant. Then he would look for the next one. In small foraging groups or hunter-gatherer camps, women of reproductive age are pregnant or nursing most of the time, making menstruation relatively rare. From the standpoint of female coalitions forged to secure cooperative childcare, the last thing needed is to have males fighting for access to any imminently fertile, menstrual females. Menstruation is therefore a trigger for potential conflict and competition both among females, because a pregnant or nursing mother risks losing male support to a cycling female, and among males, who will compete for a chance to mate such a female.*

Non-cycling females have two possible responses to this dilemma. Following the logic of concealing ovulation, they might try to hide the menstruant's condition so that males would not know. But because the signal has economic value in attracting male attention, rather than hide it, we predict females will do the opposite—flaunt it… whenever a coalition member menstruated, the whole coalition joined in advertising and amplifying the signal to attract outsider males and their labor to the coalition. We predict that females within coalitions would begin to use blood-colored substances as cosmetics to augment their signals.

To clarify, the female cosmetic strategy aims to deter alpha males who try to get sexual access without any investment. Females (with male kin help) can achieve this by physical means of surrounding a menstrual female and refusing to let anyone near. But by the same token, the cosmetic display encourages investor males who are willing to bring back supplies to the whole female coalition. Those cosmetically decorated females who create an impressive show of unity and solidarity are making life harder for the alpha males, ensuring that investor males get the fitness rewards. It will be in the interests of investor males to sexually select females who belong to ritual cosmetic coalitions, because they eliminate competition from non-investor dominant males.

Female cosmetic rituals generate a prototype 'moral' strategy, with non-cycling females aiming to obstruct and control sexual access to cycling females—a basis for the emergence of the puberty rituals, taboos, and prohibitions that surround menstruation in so many ethnographic accounts (Knight, 1991)… rules about sex as the basis of human morality are intrinsic to the FCC model…

the FCC strategy clearly demarcates those who belong to kin coalitions from those who are outsiders from other kin groups—males doing bride-service. It therefore institutes chains of connection across landscapes through sexual and economic exchange with men in fact being exchanged between matrikin groups…

the FCC model clearly prioritizes investment in childcare, consonant with maximization of brain sizes… in the context of ritual sexual 'warfare,' male investors will be happy to 'lose' every time for the sake of their offspring, so cultural practice and tradition will be consistently accumulated and replicated. We expect regular use of blood-red body paint as a diagnostic marker of human symbolic lineages…

In the case of cosmetic coalitions, fictiveness is a necessary feature of the signalling. The agreement that something which is fake blood stands for blood is normative and conventional. Even where cosmetic coalitionary display only occurred when someone really menstruated, we can see how FCCs would create and share fictions by the logic of resistance to dominance.

To refuse any male advance, female kin coalitions would signal 'no' with their bodies, by reversing the settings of the species mate-recognition system. So instead of stereotypically 'female' displays, expect ritual performers to be role-playing 'male.' Instead of 'human,' expect pantomime representations of animal movements and sounds. These song-and-dance displays where females signal 'wrong species/wrong sex' will become the signature of ritual power, establishing the inviolable, taboo, or sacred state of menstrual or body-painted females. The world will be turned upside down periodically—so 'wrong time'—but this negation still holds the promise of sex and fertility sometime soon. The whole performance should excite male sexual desire while refusing access for the moment.

We can now predict what reverse dominant ritual should look like. Women collectively act out the "world's first metaphor,' in which their biology has been reversed. From the standpoint of any male seeking a mate, they will appear to him as the wrong sex, the wrong species, and outside their fertile time—hence completely unavailable to him right now. While revolutionary at the level of morality, symbolism, and economics, the strategy emerges as an evolutionary adaptation, ultimately driven by male sexual selection of 'moral' female ritual participants. On this basis, through reverse gender dominance, the hunter-gatherer institution of bride-service emerges, with roughly egalitarian chances of reproductive success for all hunters."

Power, Watts and Knight add to this that "African hunter-gatherer women defy dominant males to this day by forming powerful intergenerational coalitions. These engender intense sexual solidarity and are so successful that they go beyond defense against harassment to actively motivating male commitment and provisioning" and this is where the allied work of Morna Finnegan comes in for she discusses this explicitly across three separate essays.

The first of these, from 2013, is "The Politics of Eros: ritual dialogue and egalitarianism in three Central African hunter-gather societies" and is based on ethnographic work done with contemporaneous hunter-gatherers by Finnegan and others. In many ways her subject is amenable to one such as I who, in past writing, has talked at length about a "sexual politics" – for this is exactly what we find here with the hunter-gatherers. Finnegan is continuing on with the previous discussion of Power, Watts and Knight I have already addressed and putting her own twist on it. So she discusses "power… expressed in ritual context" which concerns "the visceral, libidinal power of the body in motion" and how precisely bodies are material to the politics. Specifically, of course, this is a matter of

women's "heavy reproductive and energetic costs" and how this drives them "to develop cooperative strategies", strategies which in turn affect, shape and create a politics themselves. Here bodies and their needs and requirements are of direct importance to the structure of social relationships that are embodied. Specifically in this essay Finnegan is concerned with:

"*the mechanisms used by the Mbuti, the Mbendjele Yaka, or the BaAka in this collective movement against the possibility of coercive power. Or, more accurately, because the notion of 'against' enshrines another negative, it is about the collective movement towards a dynamic social politics that privileges relationship over ownership; persuasion over coercion; dialogue over monologue.*"

What we find here in Finnegan's interpretation is at once something both egalitarian and visceral. It is about the realities of physical co-existence and how they are negotiated in the real world outside civilisation. So it is raw, it is loud and it is physical. It is based on a "biological currency" and a "bodily epistemology" involving "forms of imagination that grow out of bodily experience". Crucially, it is taking place in a wild habitat and the relationships are as much with that as with each other. There are relations to be negotiated in all directions for the wild is alive and consequential. But it is interesting Finnegan calls it a "politics of Eros" and this has to do with a complex of relations concerned with the "ritual dialogue" of male and especially female hunter-gatherer groups, their politics and "the tension between community and coercive power; between the principles of hierarchy and egalitarianism." She writes:

"'*The politics of Eros' is a term which has come to seem appropriate for naming this complex. Eros classically indicated qualities such as love, lust, joy, intercourse – 'the*

libidinal, sexual or life instincts, which are best comprised under the name of Eros' (Freud). But as Ehrenreich has shown, the term was later shrunk to accommodate the dyad, and notions of romantic or erotic love between two people. As I became familiar with the literature on hunter-gatherer ritual dance, and particularly following a period with the Mbendjele Yaka at Mboule in Northern Congo, it struck me that there is a pervasive sensual humour here that is largely absent from later theoretical writing. Some ethnographers refer in passing to the fact that Yaka women and children dance constantly simply 'because it's a good thing'. It is this feel-good factor, visible in gendered ritual exchanges, which seems to be integral to their efficacy. Using the term 'Eros' as a caption for what we see in these dances is also one way to keep an eye on the positive aspect of a political system that confounds traditional understandings of power. I could have said 'the politics of sex', 'the politics of joy', or 'the politics of motion'. But Eros, in the old, complete sense, seems to encompass all of these elements.

Returning to the issue of how to understand egalitarian systems, Woodburn, like Gledhill, has made the point that equality in such societies is never neutral – 'the mere absence of inequality or hierarchy' – but is assertively and repeatedly acted out. Egalitarian society is defined by a number of features which set it apart from hierarchical society, and an acknowledgement of these is central to understanding women's status in such groups. They include the social and ideological imperative to share; direct access to material resources, knowledge, and skills by all members of the community; relative gender and age equality; an unparalleled degree of individual autonomy; and a strong emphasis on territorial mobility. The attributes defined by Woodburn are part of a general social ethos mitigating above all against privatization, whether of people, things, or items of knowledge. Woodburn frames this as the 'disengagement' of people from property, and follows the logic to a more subtle disengagement of people from restrictive social commitments and dependencies.

Like the Pintupi communities described by Myers, for whom autonomy and relatedness constituted part of the same complex relational life, Woodburn identifies a distinctive sociality in which the obligations of close relationship are always being simultaneously cultivated and repelled. Certain Central African hunter-gatherers make this simultaneity the founding principle of their ritual life, in a collective acknowledgement that the creative 'opposition of one person to another' (Bakhtin) can instigate a kind of social flow difficult to achieve by other means. This is a politics based on the principle that carefully managed ritual opposition – a kind of intersubjective antiphony – has the capacity to churn up and circulate social power. The affirmation of egalitarianism through a seemingly antagonistic ritual play makes sense in view of Myers' and Woodburn's understanding of hunter-gatherer egalitarianism as perpetually balanced on the fine line between autonomy and connectedness.

Bird-David, in turn, has shown how fundamentally different metaphors about relationship shape the respective economic systems of hunter-gatherers such as the Nayaka and their farmer neighbours the Bette Kurumbu. Nayaka ideas about the environment gravitate around a root metaphor of 'forest is parent' which represents what Bird-David terms a 'local economic model ... Unlike Western models, exotic economic models are constructed about primary metaphors that are frequently drawn from the human body or family'. The Nayaka model of a giving parent who provides irrespective of his or her child's conduct is in contrast with a potentially punitive ancestor who gives only if the correct behaviour is observed. The important point here is the expectation of generosity. This active resistance to privatization, and the sociality which is inseparable from it, is important to understanding the way in which the collective body is subsequently manifest in such communities."

As we have already seen from the scholarship of Power, and Power, Watts and Knight, the role female coalitions play in these societies is paramount. In regard to her own research Finnegan notes that "women's social prominence in the three societies cited is not a result of their egalitarianism, but a causal factor in it." In other words, female coalitions have actively shaped these polities in materially significant ways through their use of sexually charged rituals ("During their dances women link arms, sprawling on the earth, working up erotic frenzies, and executing choreographies the beauty of which is believed to summon forest spirits and captivate game animals") and collective female strategies that secure cooperation in child care. Finnegan emphasises that this is then exactly about the body and its use and that "'Gender' here is not the quietly instilled disposition that freezes like a mask over the individual. Gender in these societies remains loud; political; a live thing in the hands of the coalitions who use it to produce power." Finnegan adds that since these polities are exactly about "somatic power" then "The very notion of 'having' as opposed to 'being' a body derives from an ideology of ownership not appropriate to egalitarian societies." Consequently, to come back to her term "politics of Eros" again, Finnegan says that:

"*I use the term 'the politics of Eros' to refer to a creative ritual complex stressing the power of sex, procreation, laughter, and aesthetics – the world of blood and breath – over the possibility of hierarchy and closure. Biology here is culture. And 'gender' is what coalesces in the ritual tension between the sexes, a 'play of forces' (Turner) that fizzes continually in certain Central African hunter-gatherer communities.*"

But it is when Finnegan gets to discussing the "ethnographic context" here, however, that substantial meat is put on these bones:

"Turnbull focused on the Mbuti, forest hunter-gatherers in the then Belgian Congo, within their own cultural environment. For him, collective performances of singing and dancing formed the substance of Mbuti religious life, in opposition to the more formal and hierarchical rituals of neighbouring agriculturalists. In subsequent essays, such as the one I use here, Turnbull developed a thesis about Mbuti inter-sexual ritual as fundamental to the development of non-aggressive behaviour. Kisluik, a musicologist, studied the song and dance performances of Aka groups in the Lobaye-Ibenga area of Central African Republic. Her interest in ethnographic narrative combined with a detailed knowledge of women's dance cults provides rich data on the sociality of Aka ritual and dance. (Jerome) Lewis (of the Radical Anthropology Group) conducted an extensive, three-year-long study of Yaka religion and 'ritual associations' – groups of initiates aligned to particular forest spirits. He, like Turnbull, connects these to the politics of gender in Yaka community.

All those I refer to as 'forest peoples' spend at least four months a year hunting and gathering continuously in the forest, during which time they live in small groups composed of a few families. All have 'a strong identity with and preference for forest life'. All share a distinctive polyphonic song style and what Lewis, following Barnard, has described as a particular 'ritual grammar'. Many writers comment on the broad cosmological and religious similarities between groups from diverse parts of the Congo basin. It is this ethnographic fund, combined with my own brief fieldwork experience with Mbendjele Yaka in Northern Congo-Brazzaville, that has generated the theoretical connections I make here. Before going further, however, I want to take a brief look at a typical Mbendjele camp setting, based on my experience at Mboule – a semi-permanent camp in the Likouala region of Northern Congo. The community at Mboule is comparatively large by Mbendjele standards. During the dry season, when families return from the forest, the total population numbers close to eighty. The central camp clearing is a thin lane hedged on both sides by rainforest,

where women congregate around the doorways of small individual oma (shelters), grinding palm nuts, feeding babies, singing, and talking. The camp serves as a base from which women collectively set out on daily gathering expeditions. Men hunt more sporadically and in smaller groups of two to four individuals. Gathered foods are processed by women at their own fires, but these too burn outside doorways that lean towards one another in an intimate architecture reminiscent of Morgan's 'longhouse economy'. One of the first things you notice on entering an Mbendjele camp is the collective nature of women's movement. Whether during trips to the forest, on fishing expeditions, or in the late afternoon preparation and consumption of food, they work and move in clusters, maintaining a loud, sing-song conversation with each other and the community at large.

As evening deepens and the light abruptly disappears, men sit along the central camp space rocking infants and smoking. Almost without exception, women's banter gathers momentum until it slips from 'speech' into song, from song into dance. The energy of the camp shifts as a small group of women either forms a circle, or assumes a more formal interlocked band that storms the length of camp – chanting, singing, laughing. People of all ages and both sexes gather to watch or join the singing. On some occasions, a counter-aggregate of young men is mobilized, and a new melody drawing on the sounds of forest animals is generated. Some evenings, the dancing burns out within an hour. On others, it continues long into the night and towards dawn. Most dances are initiated by young women, who dominate the singing and provoke men to a response. Forming a close (physically intertwined) group, women use their song to galvanize or taunt men. As a kind of language, these dances far exceed the possibility of lexical forms, structuring a visceral inter-sexual conversation.

It is this active ritual exchange that Turnbull, in a detailed essay on the politics of non-aggression among Mbuti forest hunter-gatherers, chooses to foreground. He begins his analysis with a description of the unborn child as a person whose relationship with forest and community has already commenced. Shortly after birth, infants are passed around a variety of complementary 'mothers' so that the child's experience of parenting begins to incorporate 'a plurality of mothers and safe territories'. Central African hunter-gatherers are notable for the remarkable extent to which babies are held and carried. Turnbull's work implies that this incorporation of the infant's body into the body of the community, and, beyond that, the body of the forest, has profound consequences for the bodily kinesis we see later in the ritual domain. His work suggests that this kind of sociality derives from a corporeal imperative instilled from birth. If it is true that the absorption of a particular habitus (Bourdieu) rests on a plethora of subtle bodily indicators and perceptions, then the social implications of this intensely communistic mode of parenting by forest hunter-gatherers remains under-analysed. It is common knowledge among ethnographers of Yaka peoples that breastfeeding is not an individual woman's prerogative. Mbendjele babies are nursed routinely by women other than their biological mother. Again, the socio-political consequences of diffusing such labour out into the community – of literally sharing substance – has received little attention by social anthropologists (although biological anthropologists such as Hrdy have been calling attention to the interesting cultural possibilities raised by this level of maternal co-operation for some time).

All of this is a preamble, however, to the main source of akami (conflict, noise, or hunger): sex. Turnbull postulates that it's the potential conflict between the sexes that is from the moment of birth onwards being prepared for by parenting and socialization practices which emphasize the need for co-operation and the integrity of community. He stresses that 'it is sex and sexual relationships that are important to the Mbuti both as a potential source of

aggressivity and as a principle of social organization'. It is at the moment that male youths begin to hunt seriously and girls to menstruate that akami rises to the level of performance. The opposition of the sexes is clarified by those rituals which formalize and showcase difference. Ostensibly, it is the need to avert conflict between the sexes that is performed. Yet this is achieved in the ritual theatre of conflict. It's worth mentioning here Turner's examination of the Anglo-Saxon etymology of 'play', where he cites pleyan (to dance), or plega (a fight, a battle). He then goes on to refer to the idea of 'a danced-out or ritualized fight'. The 'honey-bee dance' described by Turnbull manifests this 'danced-out or ritualized fight', graphically portraying the tension of desire and 'the individual quest for pleasure'. The dance is a bodily commentary on the social interweaving of sex and labour, the way in which themes of complementarity and sharing mediate both. Sex and honey as metaphors are used interchangeably in many Central African cosmologies, the sweetness of both being something one must hunt and share. Men are the prime honey hunters, and are expected to return caches of it to their wives. During the honey-bee dance, men in one line, brandishing bows and arrows, advance on women, wielding burning firebrands in another. In Mbuti communities it is women who control fire, and the ritual intention of the men is to steal this. By stealing fire, men steal women's cultural power over food brought into camp, and subsequently over honey. As they approach, however, women break lines and attack men aggressively with burning torches, spraying them with sparks and coals. 'Unlike the tug-of-war, this dance has a rather more definite conclusion in that the men never succeed in their attempt to "steal" honey'. The dance concludes when an older woman presents a leaf cup of honey to the men.

Here, the giving out and pulling back rhythm is tangible between the sexes. Turnbull is explicit in his view of inter-sexual tension as 'the major line of potential conflict' for the Mbuti, in contrast to stereotypes confining political negotiation to men and intra-male

power struggles. Ekokomea, 'the most formal of the rituals of reversal', demonstrates this by its explicit spotlight on sex. 'In ekokomea … groups of women and men ... ridicule the opposite sex, most often in terms of sexual behaviour and cleanliness ... Until the ridicule itself goes so far beyond the realm of reason that aggressivity becomes unthinkable'. This brings out a key characteristic of all such collective performances of tension through burlesque. Using a concerted mockery of the biological self, of sex and sexual bodies, the core social issue is flagged and overturned in one move. When friction reaches a climax in the community, recourse is sought to such bawdy exchanges. Two things are being commented upon then in sequence. One is the assertion of a female-controlled reproductive body. The other is the paradox of the twisting of this, the refraction back at men (and for men, at women) of the pantomime of sex and sexual identity. Through ritual commentaries like ekokomea the conjugal relationship is temporarily destabilized in favour of same-sex solidarity. But this regrouping is set within a broader cosmological tapestry that weaves together female procreative power and male hunting power, male observance of prohibitions surrounding menstrual blood and female ritual hunting. As in many hunter-gatherer societies, where one of the sexes claims corporeal speciality, the other steps forward with a corresponding ideological or metaphysical prowess. And in fact, Turnbull's analysis of the communal achievement of non-aggression is striking in its interpretation of things conventionally assumed to be male privileges as burdens placed upon adult men by the community. What comes through in his writing is not the omnipotent hunter busy accruing economic and ritual prestige, but men as relational beings – sons, brothers, husbands – who are always involved in a gendered debate entailing compromise and self-control."

What we have here is the imagination and acting out of a raw bodily viscerality which creates polity. Finnegan says that " Public ritual performances among the Mbendjele Yaka,

the BaAka, or the Mbuti operate as a powerful bodily statement on behalf of egalitarian reality. These exchanges are a means of creating society, not one of society's tools. The conversation they ignite between the sexes *is* the structure (albeit a fluid, fizzing structure) of social life itself" (emphasis hers). This approach continues in her second essay "Dance, play, laugh: What capitalism can't do" in which Finnegan actively contrasts these polities with a capitalist one in which she emphasises that "The entire corporeal, social, political, territorial, ritual and cosmological field is… qualitatively different between societies premised on privatisation, and those premised on the movement against it." In terms more pertinent to this chapter we might then say generally that the indigenous is not the civilised – and vice versa. Key to this opposition in this essay by Finnegan is precisely how these contrasting societies utilise the body. The indigenous emphasis forces bodies to collide and have impact one on another – they are thrown in each others' faces with desire undisguised as a part of a "sensuous relationship" with material reality and its co-inhabitants – whereas for capitalism desire must be repressed, explicitly controlled and directed (since it is directed towards privatising ends). Finnegan finds the work of Deleuze and Guattari relevant here for (in *Anti-Oedipus*, for example) they discuss how capitalism must counteract "the explosive power of desire" if it hopes to preserve its "structures of exploitation, servitude, and hierarchy." This is roving over territory we covered before in the words of Ward Churchill for it is simply another way to point out that for the indigenous the body is consciously tied to the materiality of the world thought of as nature in a way that for civilisation (now capitalist civilisation) it must be severed from. I muse once again here that "the wild" is that which refuses to be controlled whereas civilisation inevitably becomes that which must control. Finnegan can riff on a similar thought here through Marcuse's *Eros and Civilisation*:

"*Marcuse viewed the concept of Eros as fundamental to resisting what he termed 'the logic of domination', which was the core characteristic of industrial capitalism. Under the logic of domination, emotion, sensuality and imagination are systematically devalued and repressed. But given the relationship between capitalism and the violence of physical dissociation, we can see that this is not about the straightforward repression of desire. The question raised by the existence of non-capitalist societies is what happens to all that surplus energy? That immense fund of raw sexual power and collective physical jouissance? Because as we've seen, capitalism by its nature will not simply repress, it will capitalise on what has been stolen.*"

The simple point here is that the indigenous hunter-gatherer societies exampled by Finnegan and others take that energy and utilise it for "fluid interaction and mutuality" which work themselves out through "roles dictating the affinities of the sexes" which work to "share social power". Here "'the body' is just one piece in a larger cosmological tapestry vibrating with kinetic power" in a way that can only terrify capitalist society with its need to strictly control and exploit for its own privatising purposes. And so:

"*we begin to see the logic in early capitalism's cutting off of the female procreative body from the ritual language in which it was embedded. A language which, we can hypothesise on the basis of the Central African ethnography, potentially forged the raw material of sexual desire and reproductive processes into a coherent political complex. A form of power.*"

Finnegan's third and final essay is from the anthology volume she co-edits with Camilla Power and Hillary Callan, *Human Origins: Contributions from Social Anthropology*. This returns once more to the FCC theory of Knight, Power, Watts and others in wanting to

discuss “Sexual Egalitarianism in Social Anthropology’s Room”. Summarising her position here she writes:

“*Knight’s theory of the origins of symbolic culture (beginning with his book Blood Relations in 1991) holds that coalitions of early modern human females were able to generate the first symbolic concepts by pooling their reproductive energy and working together to ensure the survival of offspring. The model relies on a lunar framework, where female kin coalitions exert and relinquish power periodically. If we apply the structural aspect of this model to contemporary African hunter-gatherers, what do we find? Certain Central African hunter-gatherers maintain a political field based on ritual periodicity. Rooted in the tropes of sex, reproduction and desire, this system produces energy through a perpetual oscillation of power across the social landscape. Female co-operation is central to the loud corporate voice women have in these societies. As Peacock (1991) and others have shown, this is in turn linked to the high levels of communal childcare found within such groups… The argument I put forward, following Knight, is that the kind of prosocial power conducive to the emergence of sexual egalitarianism is driven by female co-operative strategies. As such, it differs in nature from the dominance-based power familiar to hierarchical societies. Inherently diffusive and dialogical, egalitarian power functions through a process of continual oscillation through time and space.*”

In this particular essay an interesting point is made: real sexual, social and political egalitarianism that exists for real out there in the world, particularly in native or indigenous environments, *has no requirement to manifest itself according to Western expectations of it.* It is not a case of conforming and so neither is it a case of Western judgements or assessments of indigenous culture being normative. Implicit in the idea of culture itself, as indeed it is implicit on the idea of a “wild” at all, is the reality of both

diversity and so of a freedom which is its own self-actualising nature. In this understanding relations which create cultures and polities are left, and must be left, to construct themselves organically and as they can according to their own conditions. As Finnegan herself then notes here:

"*Any live system has to be recurrently performed. Keeping these issues public, where they can be debated, is crucial… if we step back and observe the kind of power that egalitarianism depends upon, regardless of the system employed to manage it, this almost without fail has a dialogical quality, moving continually across the social field. In order to remain open, it has to be subjected to a process of continual renegotiation. This model for how egalitarian power functions through the strategic opposition of one subgroup to another, the performance of conflict through dance, and the periodic ritual withdrawal of one sex from another, provides a valuable paradigm for looking at power and its uses in contemporary hunter-gatherer society.*"

But here we are not just being political with this. We are also making an argument about human origins in a rhetorical world in which "where we came from" or "how we got here" is also often used to bolster modern day political rhetorics of various kinds. Consequently:

"*Placing the human symbolic revolution in Darwinian context, Knight, Power and Watts write: 'If the story of human evolution is encephalisation, the materialist subtext must be how females fuelled the production of increasingly large-brained, burdensome offspring'. Their answer is that through a series of energetic and reproductive cycle changes, females were able to drastically increase male paternal investment. Concealment of ovulation with loss of oestrus, and continuous receptivity along with probable menstrual cycle synchrony, would have forced males toward prolonged consortships. For the first time they would have*

had to invest not only in relationships with partners but crucially, with babies. The story is essentially a counter to the old 'prostitution model' derived from placing man-the-hunter centre stage in any posited evolutionary scenario. Knight and colleagues argue for a defining moment in human history when coalitions of reproductively burdened females began to unite to send mates away from base camps in order to procure meat. The ritual relationship of game blood with menstrual blood is much documented. The ethnographic literature on the requirement of hunters to return their kill to camp where it can be shared and cooked collectively, the dominance of women over cooking fire, and the symbolic connections between female blood and game blood are ubiquitous. Turnbull (1961) describes an important Mbuti ritual in which hunters explicitly attempt to steal cooking fire, and are beaten back by women… The insistence on routine male provisioning and paternal investment was, Knight argues, prompted by necessity, and generated a collective political statement about the inviolability of the female body. This strike moment, signalled by lunar phase-locked rituals designed to override the pair-bond and structure big-game hunting, had the practical effect of providing invaluable nutritional assistance to mothers and children. Sex-strike is in effect 'a moral strategy'.

Biological anthropologist Sarah Hrdy (2009) arrives at the same conclusion. All apes, she points out, share a capacity for Machiavellian intelligence. They are all socially astute, sharing cognitive capacities and incipient 'theory of mind'. What distinguishes humans is the need to connect and share inner states with others, to intuit intentions, communicate ideas, and be deeply affected by what others are thinking. All of this she attributes to our ancient evolutionary history of cooperative breeding. And she assembles a huge wealth of data to support her contention that these first co-operatively breeding communities were kin-based matrilineal communities where mothers had access not only to their own kin but, crucially, came to depend on assistance from others in rearing their young. The emotional

sophistication that distinguishes humans could only have evolved in a context where there was a requirement to focus habitually on the thoughts and feelings of others. Since it was mothers who would have borne the brunt of growing brain size and slow-maturing offspring, it makes sense to assume they would have driven the strategic move towards communal childcare. She speculates that emotional modernity cannot have emerged concurrent with anatomically and behaviourally modern humans because in order for sophisticated language and symbolism to evolve, a foundation of 'mindreading' was required.

Hrdy's work brings out above all the contingent nature of prosocial impulses previously assumed to be an innate part of human being. She states unequivocally: 'Although highly complex co-evolutionary processes were involved in the evolution of extended lifespans, prolonged childhoods, and bigger brains … cooperative breeding was the pre-existing condition that permitted the evolution of these traits in the hominin line'. Social support from matrilineal kin in addition to reliable alloparental care would have pre-empted and facilitated the later development of symbolic thought and language. According to these models, Engels was right. Communal childcare is the ancient template for the human line. If in societies like the Aka, the Mbuti, the Yaka, the Nayaka or the Batek people view their world as a 'giving' place, that is because in reality it is. The philosophy is first and foremost a sensual philosophy, a thought rooted in the earliest experiences of the body in the world."

What we are talking about here is how one species of wild animal, the human animal, learned to work together meaningfully and so survive. It is not just a matter of practical strategies but also the creation of ways of seeing the world (otherwise known as imagination). For example, Finnegan later writes in this essay:

"*For the Mbendjele Yaka there is an explicit and obvious interplay between women's blood, voracious blood-eating forest spirits, and game animals. When a hunter whose wife is pregnant kills in the forest, he must throw certain parts of the animal's intestines into the undergrowth to mollify the edio spirits who normally enjoy women's menstrual blood. In having 'cut her moon' (Mbendjele idiom for conception), the husband of a pregnant woman has interceded directly in this relationship, and must make some gesture towards the spirits: hence the offering of the bloody innards. 'An older man might also add the words "Take it!" or "That's yours!"'. By giving up his meat the hunter bargains with the forest spirits and animals for the safe delivery of the infant.*"

Whatever else we might say about this we would have to conceive that it concerns an involved and naturalistic imaginary about the whole world (a cosmology, in fact). Such imaginaries and actions are literally part of enchanting a world that those concerned imagine they live within where everything, the rituals, the hunting, the blood, the men, women and children, the sexuality, the environment and the egalitarianism, all make sense. It all constructs a symbolic field and a visceral epistemology aimed at material and imaginal survival as a particular polity. And this, the judgements of the civilisationalists Graeber and Wengrow notwithstanding, is not "simple". Finnegan openly describes it as "complex egalitarianism" and so one has to wonder how Graeber and Wengrow came to the conclusion in their work that such a thing was remotely "simple" and certainly not "complex" when it seems quite difficult for us to imagine how a genuine egalitarian society can even exist given the general modern Western experience in which it both does not and never really has in millennia. Western civilisation is built four square on hierarchy, control and exploitation (of one sex of another if also in many other ways). So to read of societies where sexual egalitarianism is a reality – and also to read that it may also have been the actual and general *bona fide* ancestry of our particular species, is

somewhat remarkable and should seem to be a stunning achievement of a social and political complexity that we modern Westerners, for all our ability to construct dangerous machines, coercive hierarchies and surveillance technologies, have been completely unable to replicate.

This seems to me to be at least part of the reason why Graeber and Wengrow reject the thesis of Power, Watts, Knight, Finnegan, et. al. That there might have been a genuine state of egalitarianism from which to fall, Garden of Eden-like, is a knock to the middle class academic and civilised pride of such as these bourgeois civilisationalists and they take that personally for they are men who are civilisationally identified and committed (as so many of the middle classes are since they see in civilisation their only means of survival – and so cling to it). Thus, civilisation cannot be theoretically jettisoned for too much has been invested in it by them. It is then beneath them, for all their academic acquaintance with other cultures and imaginaries, to imagine that someone who lives in a hut in the forest and engages in ritual dancing when they are not sleeping too much has found something that we have not and has found a way of life at once simple and egalitarian but yet also one of our species' most complex and worthwhile achievements – a complex simplicity of living. It is then ironic that for all their talk about the human being's inordinate capacity for creative play and "bold social experiments" they cannot imagine themselves out of the imaginary of civilisation – and perceive of their task as making it either more benevolent or, if not that, then at least benign. They then fool themselves into thinking that it could ever be either of these things because their inability to think themselves out of civilisation makes its maintenance and perpetuation into a complex of relations they cannot escape and something that anyone else should not be allowed to escape.

The thing is, Graeber and Wengrow should know better. Neither are ignorant of indigenous people or, indeed, of prehistoric ones. Yet it is the French anthropologist Pierre Clastres who reminds us in “Society Against the State” (the final essay in the book of the same name) that “Primitive societies are societies without a State” (thus echoing the “simple” charge of G+W in regard to the hunter-gatherers). *But* Clastres, in differentiation to G+W, essentially then goes on to argue, as the beginning to this essay, that that is an ethnocentric statement born of people who have been colonised by civilisation:

“*Primitive societies are societies without a State. This factual judgment, accurate in itself, actually hides an opinion, a value judgment that immediately throws doubt on the possibility of constituting political anthropology as a strict science. What the statement says, in fact, is that primitive societies are missing something - the State - that is essential to them, as it is to any other society: our own, for instance. Consequently, those societies are incomplete; they are not quite true societies - they are not civilized - their existence continues to suffer the painful experience of a lack - the lack of a State - which, try as they may, they will never make up. Whether clearly stated or not, that is what comes through in the explorers' chronicles and the work of researchers alike: society is inconceivable without the State; the State is the destiny of every society. One detects an ethnocentric bias in this approach; more often than not it is unconscious, and so the more firmly anchored. Its immediate, spontaneous reference, while perhaps not the best known, is in any case the most familiar. In effect, each one of us carries within himself, internalized like the believer's faith, the certitude that society exists for the State. How, then, can one conceive of the very existence of primitive societies if not as the rejects of universal history, anachronistic relies of a remote stage that everywhere else has been transcended?*”

Consequently, I can only imagine that Graeber and Wengrow are the similarly colonised from a “wild” perspective and that they replicate the effect of this civilisational mind pox in their writing. Whilst they criticise the idea that “history is a one-way progression, that every society is condemned to enter into that history and pass through the stages which lead from savagery to civilization” (as Clastres puts it), they evince no enthusiasm for turning back any metaphorical clocks, engaging in cultural refusal or evaluating modern civilisation negatively in the light of former (and more “primitive”) complex simplicities or simple complexities. All they can seemingly imagine is that we might have to give stuff up and become like people who live in the African bush or equatorial rain forests – which are hardly judgements anyone but dogmatic primitivist activists have ever suggested. Instead, they invent the humanity of “bold social experiments” whilst clearly preferring some experiments more than others for reasons not fully disclosed.

Of course, Clastres in “Society Against the State” can refer to “the same old evolutionism” just as dismissively as Graeber and Wengrow can. BUT AT LEAST HE IS WRITING ABOUT SOCIETIES THAT REFUSE THE STATE. Is *The Dawn of Everything* such a book or does it contribute to rehabilitating various forms of State as “benevolent states”, the sort of states Murray Bookchin may once have lain awake at night dreaming about or which, in their view, present a better, more acceptable face of civilisation? In any case, Graeber and Wengrow demonstrate that being anti-evolutionary is not of much material relevance when dismissing the primitives who have no states for those Clastres writes to counter are *evolutionary* in their thinking where G+W *are not*. What they have in common is a civilisational fixation which manifests through the civilisational prejudices embedded in them from birth and imbibed with mother’s milk. So whilst Clastres judges his contemporary anthropological discourse much as Sahlins did at the beginning of this

chapter (summed up as “to use our own world as the reference point”) we may assert that Graeber and Wengrow don’t appear to be doing much different at the end of the day.

The issue then becomes the false one of how we can have now, this present development of civilisation, but as a good or benevolent version of the same; something like these conditions but without these effects – presumably thanks to yet more of these “bold experiments”. And the answer to that should be blindingly obvious: YOU DON’T. YOU CAN’T. IT IS A FANTASY. The material relations of now make what those relations can make. To change the outcome YOU MUST CHANGE THE RELATIONS which will mean changing (indeed, LIBERATING) values, beliefs and desires, procedures, behaviours and arrangements. Or as Graeber himself said introducing Sahlins: “Everything must be reimagined”. In simple terms, the primitive stateless people discussed by Clastres and the hunter-gatherers discussed by the Radical Anthropology Group and others construct different relations because they believe and value different things AND THAT IS WHY they can have things like egalitarianism where we Western civilisationalists cannot. You have to make the choices and live the consequences. There’s no short cut. So, in my eyes, it is something like now OR egalitarianism. Because if the material relations of this civilisation *could* produce an egalitarian society then *they would have by now*. As far as I can tell, however, they were never imagined in the first place to be able to do so. And so of course they don’t. So when Graeber and Wengrow wonder how we can become unstuck I think the answer is rather straightforward: we must absolutely relate to each other differently, in reimagined ways. BUT NOT NECESSARILY IN WAYS THAT HAVE NEVER EXISTED BEFORE.

The fact is that the civilisational mind and the indigenous mind (as I am rhetorically terming them here) are not the same thing. They want different things and they have

different values and techniques to achieve what they want. They judge differently. Take, for example, the idea of a “subsistence economy”, a civilised idea since no indigenous person thinks of themselves as merely “subsisting” of even of “subsistence” as a mode of existence differential to something that isn’t this; they are simply living in the best way they know how. Clastres has this to say about it:

“*the notion of a subsistence economy conceals within it the implicit assumption that if primitive societies do not produce a surplus, this is because they are incapable of doing so, entirely absorbed as they are in producing the minimum necessary for survival, for subsistence. The time-tested and ever serviceable image of the destitution of the Savages. And, to explain that inability of primitive societies to tear themselves away from the stagnation of living hand lo mouth, from perpetual alienation in the search for food it is said they are technically under-equipped, technologically inferior.*

What is the reality? If one understands by technics the set of procedures men acquire not to ensure the absolute mastery of nature (that obtains only for our world and its insane Cartesian project, whose ecological consequences are just beginning to be measured), but to ensure a mastery of the natural environment suited and relative ta their needs, then there is no longer any reason whatever to impute a technical inferiority to primitive societies: they demonstrate an ability to satisfy their needs which is at least equal to that of which industrial and technological society is so proud. What this means is that every human group manages, perforce, to exercise the necessary minimum of domination over the environment it inhabits. Up to the present we know of no society that has occupied a natural space impossible to master, except for reasons of force or violence: either it disappears, or it changes territories. The astonishing thing about the Eskimo, or the Australians, is precisely the diversity, imagination, and fine quality of their technical activity, the power of invention

and efficiency evident in the tools used by those peoples. Furthermore, one only has to spend a little time in an ethnographic museum: the quality of workmanship displayed in manufacturing the implements of everyday life makes nearly every humble tool into a work of art. Hence there is no hierarchy in the technical domain; there is no superior or inferior technology. The only measure of how well a society is equipped in technology is its ability to meet its needs in a given environment. And from this point of view, it does not appear in the least that primitive societies prove incapable of providing themselves with the means to achieve that end. Of course, the power of technical innovation shown by primitive societies spreads over a period of time. Nothing is immediately given; there is always the patient work of observation and research, the long succession of trials and errors, successes and failures. Prehistorians inform us of the number of millennia required by the men of the Paleolithic to replace the crude bifaces of the beginning with the admirable blades of the Solutrian. From another viewpoint, one notes that the discovery of agriculture and the domestication of plants occurred at about the same time in America and the Old World. One is forced to acknowledge that the Amerindians are in no way inferior – quite the contrary - in the art of selecting and differentiating between manifold varieties of useful plants."

The point here, once again, is that this is one (civilised) culture judging another (indigenous) one – and that judgement will always go in civilisation's favour even as it does with Graeber and Wengrow and even if they will allow natives like Kandiaronk to carp and criticise from the side in order to educate the civilised. When Clastres broadens the discussion out to include the subject of "work" this becomes even clearer:

"*Men work more than their needs require only when forced to. And it is just that kind of force which is absent from the primitive world; the absence of that external force even*

defines the nature of primitive society. The term, subsistence economy, is acceptable for describing the economic organization of those societies, provided it is taken to mean not the necessity that derives from a lack, an incapacity inherent in that type of society and its technology; but the contrary: the refusal of a useless excess, the determination to make productive activity agree with the satisfaction of needs. And nothing more."

What has been skipped over here to explain this is Clastres' evaluation of the "axioms" driving Western civilisation forward:

"*two axioms seem to have guided the advance of Western civilization from the outset: the first maintains that true societies unfold in the protective shadow of the State; the second states a categorical imperative: man must work.*"

Readers will have seen from the ethnographically based sections of this chapter earlier that the hunter-gatherers of contemporary Africa and in our putative past had no such desire for either the State or for work. "And even so, they did not die of hunger", says Clastres, as if mere satisfaction of immediate bodily desires was all that really matters. Not that the modern denizen of civilisation can imagine that for he or she is by now being advertised at (often regardless of their will) for every moment of the day that they remain conscious and actively induced to want whatever it is that capitalism produces these days. In such a situation people are marks to be exploited in a way that the people in the hunter-gatherer communities that were discussed earlier could never be. Having no money has its compensations, one of which is that, knowing that, no one will bother you trying to get as much of it off you as they can. Fortunately, for any who happen to make them up, Clastres reports that "Primitive societies are… societies characterised by the rejection of work" and consequently he agrees with the aforementioned Sahlins that

these were the first “leisure societies” and, perhaps, with the idea that before the capitalists came along no one thought that the point of life was work at all. Consequently, you get the following reasoning:

“*The advantage of a metal axe over a stone axe is too obvious to require much discussion: one can do perhaps ten times as much work with the first in the same amount of time as with the second; or else, complete the same amount of work in one-tenth of the time. And when the Indians discovered the productive superiority of the white men's axes, they wanted them not in order to produce more in the same amount of time, but to produce as much in a period of time ten times shorter.*”

Human beings, that is, indigenous human beings, need their sleep and their chatter and their idle play. And so it comes to be about what your imaginary is, what your polity is and that of the indigenous is not that of the civilised. In a sense you get Sahlins’ division between the economic and the uneconomic versions of human beings, those who are set to work by superiors and an entire judging morality of work and those who would do all they could to even avoid the slightest taint of “work” but, at the very least, do the absolute minimum necessary to keep life rolling along. Clastres puts it like this:

“*For man in primitive societies, the activity of production is measured precisely, delimited by the needs to be satisfied, it being understood that what is essentially involved is energy needs: production is restricted to replenishing the stock of energy expended. In other words, it is life as nature that - excepting the production of goods socially consumed on festive occasions - establishes and determines the quantity of time devoted to reproduction. This means that once its needs are fully satisfied nothing could induce primitive society to produce more, that is, to alienate its time by working for no good reason when that time is*

available for idleness, play, warfare, or festivities. What are the conditions under which this relationship between primitive man and the activity of production can change? Under what conditions can that activity be assigned a goal other than the satisfaction of energy needs? This amounts to raising the question of the origin of work as alienated labor.

ln primitive society – an essentially egalitarian society – men control their activity, control the circulation of the products of that activity: they act only on their own behalf, even though the law of exchange mediates the direct relation of man to his product. Everything is thrown into confusion, therefore, when the activity of production is diverted from its initial goal, when, instead of producing only for himself, primitive man also produces for others, without exchange and without reciprocity. That is the point at which it becomes possible to speak of labor: when the egalitarian rule of exchange ceases to constitute the "civil code" of the society, when the activity of production is aimed at satisfying the needs of others, when the order of exchange gives way to the terror of debt. It is there, in fact, that the difference between the Amazonian Savage and the Indian of the Inca empire is to be placed. All things considered, the first produces in order to live, whereas the second works in addition so that others can live, those who do not work, the masters who tell him: you must pay what you owe us, you must perpetually repay your debt to us.

When, in primitive society, the economic dynamic !ends itself to definition as a distinct and autonomous domain, when the activity of production becomes alienated, accountable labor, levied by men who will enjoy the fruits of that labor, what has come to pass is that society has been divided into rulers and ruled, masters and subjects - it has ceased to exorcise the thing that will be its ruin: power and the respect for power. Society's major division, the division that is the basis for ail the others, including no doubt the division of labor, is the new vertical ordering of things between a base and a summit; it is the great political

cleavage between those who hold the force, be it military or religious, and those subject to that force. The political relation of power precedes and founds the economic relation of exploitation. Alienation is political before it is economic; power precedes labor; the economic derives from the political; the emergence of the State determines the advent of classes."

Graeber and Wengrow ask the rather naive question "How did we get stuck?" and my answer to that is "When we started letting shit like this happen". You get stuck when you give away your freedom to someone else. You get stuck when you allow yourself to get a boss. You get stuck when you find yourself working to produce surplus for another, alienating yourself from your own actions and activities. You get stuck when you are subject to the artificial morality of debt. You get stuck when you find yourself no longer autonomous and your agency curtailed by coerced obligation to others. You get stuck when you allow yourself to be coerced or exploited. And this is why, much like Chris Knight in his essay "How did we get stuck?" in the issue of *Hunter Gatherer Research* on *The Dawn of Everything* that he co-edits with Camilla Power, it seems to me like G+W have strayed way too far over to the civilisational side of the argument. For, as Knight says in this essay:

"*Is the message here that if your way of life does not foster surplus production, then you are not quite human – not human in the full sense of that term? To be fair, the authors do not say that. But their theoretical premises would seem to imply it and in many ways they come dangerously close.*"

Graeber and Wengrow, then, in my judgement, never probe if all the things that hunter-gatherers had are actually things which cannot lead to civilisation BY DESIGN because that

would not accord with their values and their express polity, that which they value the most. They sort of assume that civilisation, as a conglomeration of relations, possibilities and values, is the standard and seem to hope that maybe we can incorporate some things into it in order to have it at its best. Maybe. This seems a very bourgeois and civilised judgement – if also one that has seen the hunter-gatherers' point of "What kind of ethical community do we want to be (and do we NOT want to be)? How must we live to make that so?" going right over their heads. Its almost as if they judge that the actual egalitarians amongst us have nothing so what's the point of being egalitarian if it leaves you in that state? (Hint: that would be exactly the point.) They forget that Sahlins accounted such people rich by this measure and not poor. (Graeber even once seemed to agree with this.) Chris Knight imagines that "They appear to be saying that freedom can be preserved on condition fluidity of some kind prevents people from getting stuck" but this fluidity and the periodicities that G+W bring into their argument when they discuss societies that had one arrangement in one season and another arrangement in another are not the periodicities of the African hunter-gatherers, arranged as they are around the natural rhythms of women's bodies and lunar phases. Such entirely natural oscillations are ones that G+W would not go near with a barge pole even if other academics have studied them in detail and formulated a working theory out of them. But I then think G+W need to listen to Clastres again:

"*This is what needs to be firmly grasped: primitive societies are not overdue embryos of subsequent societies, social bodies whose 'normal' development was arrested by some strange malady; they are not situated at the commencement of a historical logic leading straight to an end given ahead of time, but recognized only a posteriori as our own social system. (If history is that logic, how is it that primitive societies still exist?) All the foregoing is expressed, at the level of economic life, by the refusal of primitive societies to allow work*

and production to engulf them; by the decision to restrict supplies to socio-political needs; by the intrinsic impossibility of competition (in a primitive society what would be the use of being a rich man in the midst of poor men?); in short, by the prohibition - unstated but said nonetheless - of inequality."

It is ironic that G+W's discussions began at the beginning of their project in discussions about exactly "inequality" when the hunter-gatherers that have been discussed in this chapter, and which G+W largely refuse to discuss, seem people who were quite often entirely motivated to never let inequality have an origin at all if we are to believe the plausible arguments of the Radical anthropologists and others. Perhaps this is because, as Clastres further adds, "primitive societies are societies without an economy, *because they refuse an economy*" (emphasis his). That accords with the judgements of both Sahlins and Woodburn too. Are we to imagine that Graeber and Wengrow would prefer an economic human to an uneconomic one? Are we to imagine that their invention of the human polity that builds and tears down with seeming regularity just because they can needs only this ability to stay free? I think not. And Clastres seems to think not too:

"*history affords us in fact only two types of society utterly irreducible to one another, two macro-classes, each one of which encompasses societies that have something basic in common, notwithstanding their differences.* ***On the one hand, there are primitive societies, or societies without a State; on the other hand, there are societies with a State.*** *It is the presence or absence of the State apparatus (capable of assuming many forms) that assigns every society its logical place, and lays clown an irreversible line of discontinuity between the two types of society. The emergence of the State brought about the great typological division between Savage and Civilized man; it created the unbridgeable gulf whereby everything was changed, for, on the other side, Time became*

History. It has often been remarked, and rightly so, that the movement of world history was radically affected by two accelerations in its rhythm. The impetus of the first was furnished by what is termed the Neolithic Revolution (the domestication of animals, agriculture, the discovery of the arts of weaving and pottery, the subsequent sedentarization of human groups, and so forth). We are still living, and increasingly so, if one may put it that way, within the prolongation of the second acceleration, the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century." (emphasis original)

Here it is the State which makes civilised and which draws the line that inevitably ends up becoming G+W's "getting stuck" – for it is entirely the point of states to get things stuck. It is entirely the State, with its civilising ways, which does not want things to change, be fluid or transform according to its own rhythms, oscillations and self-organisation. AND THAT IS AN ANTI-WILD IMPULSE. It is an impulse contrary to the intra-societal oscillations that the hunter-gatherers, for example, demonstrate. Clastres, in fact, could not be clearer about this:

"*it is the Political break… that is decisive, and not the economic transformation. The true revolution in man's proto-history is not the Neolithic, since it may very well leave the previously existing social organization intact; it is the political revolution, that mysterious emergence - irreversible, fatal to primitive societies - of the thing we know by the name of the State.*"

The indigenous or primitive (in Clastres' terms) are not then seeking to build what we might describe as "mega-polities" either of the imagination or of the material. They are not seeking to engage in building a power base founded on the numbers of human bodies they can subsume under the same political and customary dispensations or their work.

They do not want to found states (which, first of all, means city-states rather than nation states) or mould diverse groups into one larger group which is made homogenous. In fact, Clastres says:

"*it is very probable that a basic condition for the existence of primitive societies is their relatively small demographic size. Things can function on the primitive model only if the people are few in number. Or, in other words, in order for a society to be primitive, it must be numerically small. And, in effect, what one observes in the Savage world is an extraordinary patchwork of 'nations,' tribes, and societies made up of local groups that take great care to preserve their autonomy within the larger group of which they are a part, although they may conclude temporary alliances with their nearby 'fellow-countrymen,' if the circumstances - especially those having to do with warfare - demand it. This atomization of the tribal universe is unquestionably an effective means of preventing the establishment of socio-political groupings that would incorporate the local groups and, beyond that, a means of preventing the emergence of the State, which is a unifier by nature.*"

If the indigenous is the non-state person or community then this invites us to explore the work of political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott who has done much work on the interaction between states and those who wish to resist states and so exist on the periphery of them and are consequently regarded as uncivilised, barbarians, outlaws, indigenous, vagrants, wanderers, nomads, etc. Consider, for example, chapter four of *The Art of Not Being Governed* (which is titled "Civilization and the Unruly"), a book which

discusses the civilised-uncivilised relations of the peoples of South-East Asia. It begins with a couple of interesting quotes:

"'*In effect the essential thing is to gather into groups this people which is everywhere and nowhere; the essential thing is to make them something we can seize hold of. When we have them in our hands, we will then be able to do many things which are quite impossible for us today and will perhaps allow us to capture their minds after we have captured their bodies.' —French officer, Algeria, 1845*

'This people have never turned their attention to agricultural pursuits, nor can it be expected of them until they are placed upon a reservation.… If they are not provided with such a home, they are destined to remain outside of those influences which are calculated to civilize or Christianize them … [and] render [them] useful members of society. Wild Indians, like wild horses, must be corralled upon reservations. There they can be brought to work.' —Bureau of Indian Affairs agent to the Shoshone, 1865"

Scott then enters into an extended discourse about how the civilised determine the uncivilised, etc., in the South-East Asian locale it discusses. It is worth repeating most of it for what we can learn about how such relations are configured on the ground:

"*The permanent settlement of populations is, along with taxes, perhaps the oldest state activity. It has always been accompanied by a civilizational discourse in which those who are settled are presumed to have raised their cultural and moral level…*

Much of the actual content of what it means to be 'civilized,' to be 'Han,' to be a proper 'Thai' or 'Burman' is exhausted by being a fully incorporated, registered, taxpaying subject

of the state. Being 'uncivilized' is, by contrast, often the converse: to live outside the ambit of the state… state formation creates, in its wake, a barbarian frontier of 'tribal peoples' to which it is the pole of comparison and, at the same time, the antidote…

Legitimating the classical state in Southeast Asia was, in modern parlance, a 'hard sell.' The very idea of the classical state, far from being an organic elaboration of indigenous concept of rule, was, like the modern nation-state, largely a cultural and political import. The Hinduized concept of the universal monarch provided the ideological apparatus to support a claim to ritual supremacy in a political context otherwise characterized by contending, and presumptively equal, strongmen. With the help of court Brahmins, ambitious courts from the tenth to the fourteenth century set about making large cosmological claims and incorporating local cults of their outlying provinces under an imperial ritual umbrella. The effect was something like the eighteenth-century Russian court at St. Petersburg mimicking the manners, language, and rituals of the French court at Versailles. Making such a claim stick required not just convincing theater, as Geertz has shown, but a core population whose manpower and grain could reinforce the court's claim. And this, in turn, required coercion in the form of slaving expeditions and a system of unfree labor. The classical state, in short, was anything but self-legitimating. It was perhaps for this reason that the cosmological bluster of such states tended to compensate for their relative weakness politically and militarily.

Given the fact that such states were created by an ingathering of various peoples living outside state structures, it is not surprising that the major elements representing a 'civilized' existence happen to coincide with life in the padi state: living in permanent villages in the valleys, cultivating fixed fields, preferably wet rice, recognizing a social hierarchy with kings and clerics at its apex, and professing a major salvation religion—

Buddhism, Islam, or, in the case of the Philippines, Christianity. Nor is it surprising that each of these characteristics should be the mirror image of the surrounding societies remaining outside the sphere of the padi state: the hill peoples.

Viewed from the court center of the padi state, the thinner the air you breathe, the less civilized you are. It is no exaggeration to say that the presumptive level of civilization can, from a valley perspective, be often read as a function of altitude. Those on the mountaintops are the most backward and uncivilized; those living midslope are slightly more elevated culturally; those living in upland plateaus and growing irrigated rice are, again, more advanced, though certainly inferior to those at the core of the valley state, with the court and king at its apex, who represent the pinnacle of refinement and civilization.

'Hilliness' per se is disqualifying. Thus many of the Palaung in Burma are Theravada Buddhists, dress like Burmans, and speak fluent Burmese. They are not, however, considered civilized so long as they live in the hills. A contemporary version of this correlation was expressed by a Vietnamese ethnographer, Mac Durong, famous for his pathbreaking and sympathetic studies of minorities, many of whom, he believes, were long ago driven into the hills solely because they arrived on the scene after the Vietnamese had occupied the bottomland. The logic behind his understanding of why such groups were called Man (a term that has come over the centuries to mean 'savage') was clear, as Patricia Pelley noted: 'There were legitimate reasons to refer to the highland peoples as savage, and the rationale, while not explicitly stated, was apparent: civilization could be gauged by geography, and more especially, by elevation. The people in the lowlands [ethnic Vietnamese] were fully civilized; those dwelling in the midlands were partially civilized; but highlanders were still savage, and the higher the elevation the greater the degree of savagery.' It does not suffice to terrace land and create wet-rice padis to qualify as civilized.

The Hani, along the upper reaches of the Red River in northern Vietnam, do just that and are still seen as Man.

This inversion of elevation and civilizational standing works much the same way in Thailand. As a lifelong student of the Akha (linguistically related to the Hani), the late Leo Alting von Geusau observed that the Akha, as a 'mid-slope' people, are stigmatized as uncivilized, though not so uncivilized as groups living at the highest elevations. 'This situation,' he wrote, 'is structured … in an inverse way to the sakdina [lowland Thai ranking] type of hierarchy, with the lowest class the highest up [Mon-Khmer groups such as Wa, Bulang, Khmu, Htin, and Dulong] and the socially highest situated lowest, in the valleys and plains.'

Linguistic usage in Burmese and Chinese reflects the way in which lowland centers of civilization are elevated symbolically. Thus to go to the capital city or to school is generally to 'go up' or 'climb' or 'rise' (téq). Even if one lives on a mountaintop, one still goes 'up' to Mandalay. Similarly, when one goes to rural villages or to the hills, one goes 'down' or 'descends' (s 'in), even if the place in question is thousands of feet above the capital in altitude. Here, as in some Western contexts, up and down have nothing to do with altitude and everything to do with cultural elevation.

If living at high elevations was coded 'barbarian' by the padi state, so too was physical mobility and dispersal. Here again there are strong parallels with the history of the Mediterranean world. Christian and Muslim states regarded mountain dwellers and nomadic peoples—precisely those peoples who had thus far eluded the grasp of the state—as pagan and barbarian. Muhammad himself made it abundantly clear that nomads who embraced Islam must, as a condition of their conversion, settle permanently or pledge to do

so. Islam was the faith of a sedentary elite, and it was assumed that one could not be a satisfactory Muslim without being settled. Bedouins were regarded as 'wild men,' the precise opposite of the Meccan, urban ideal. In civilizational terms, nomadism was to the Arab state what elevation was to the padi state.

In Southeast Asia as well, the idea of civilization was in large measure an agro-ecological code. Peoples who appeared to have no fixed abode, who moved constantly and unpredictably, were beyond the pale of civilization. Here the condition of remaining 'legible' to the state and producing a surplus that is readily appropriable is embedded in the concept of civilization. A similar stigma has been applied in the West as in Southeast Asia to subjects, even if ethnically and religiously part of the dominant society, who have no permanent residence: variously termed vagrants, homeless, vagabonds, tramps. Aristotle thought famously that man was by nature a citizen of a city (polis); people who chose consciously to not belong to such a community (apolis) were, by definition, of no worth. When whole peoples, such as pastoralists, gypsies, swidden cultivators follow, by choice, an itinerant or semiitinerant livelihood, they are seen as a collective threat and are collectively stigmatized.

Vietnamese, however widely they may range to find work and land, think of themselves, nevertheless, as having an ancestral place to which they will, or might, return. Those without an ancestral place are stigmatized as 'people of the four corners of the world.' Hill peoples are, by extension, whole societies of vagrants, at once pitiable, dangerous, and uncivilized. The state-sponsored 'Campaign to Sedentarize the Nomads' or the 'Campaign for Fixed Cultivation and Fixed Residence,' designed to curtail shifting cultivation and resettle highland peoples away from the frontiers and to 'teach' them wet-rice cultivation, had a deep resonance among the Vietnamese population. It seemed to them and their

officials that they were engaged in a magnanimous effort to bring backward and uncouth peoples into the fold of Vietnamese civilization.

Burmans, while less concerned than Vietnamese with ancestral tombs per se, have a comparable fear of and contempt for wanderers with no fixed abode. Such people are called lu lè lu lwin, literally, "a person blown about by the wind," which could variously be rendered as vagrant, tramp, or wanderer, with the connotation of one going to waste. Many of the hill peoples are seen in the same light as backward, unreliable, and without culture. For the Burmese, as for the Chinese, itinerant peoples were civilizationally suspect by definition. These stereotypes persist and plague hill peoples in Burma today. Thus a Catholic student of Padaung-Karen (both hill peoples) parentage hesitated when fleeing the military repression of the 1988 democratic movement on account of the stigma attached to taking refuge in the forest:

'I was afraid, quite simply of being branded as a jungle fugitive by my fellow countrymen. The word "jungle" [táw] still carried pejorative overtones in the speech of urban Burmese. Anyone taking refuge with the ethnic insurgents was called a jungle child [táw ka lé] which implied primitiveness, anarchy, violence, and disease, as well as the unpleasant proximity of wild animals which the Burmese detested. I had always been painfully sensitive about being regarded as part of a primitive tribe, and much of my ambition in Taunggyi and Mandalay had been to escape into civilization.'

The Qing general Ortai, who described the hill peoples of Yunnan as 'barbarian nomads who were the antithesis of civilized ideals,' was not only being redundant; he was expressing an equation to which all padi-state rulers might subscribe.

For the Chinese, Burmese, and Siamese states, certain modes of subsistence and the agro-ecological niche in which they were practiced were irretrievably barbaric. Hunting and gathering as well as shifting cultivation were necessarily practiced in the forests. This in itself was outside the pale. A seventeenth-century Chinese text describes the Lahu of Yunnan as 'people of the mountains, forests and streams.' It claims that they eat everything raw and do not bury their dead, comparing them to apes and monkeys. Far from entertaining the possibility that, as Anthony Walker believes, they became hill swiddeners only when they fled the valleys, they were assumed to be true aboriginals. The proof of their primitive, ur-condition was precisely the list of their customs and practices—dwellings, clothes (or their absence), footwear (or its absence), diet, burial practices, and demeanor—that contravened every ideal of Confucian civilization.

Reading some of the reports of Han officials on the multitudinous and confusing hill peoples of the southwest frontier, one is left with two impressions. The first is that of an ethnographic 'field guide to the birds'—the Lahu wear such-and-such colors, can be found in such-and-such a habitat, and subsist in such-and-such a manner—allowing administrators to recognize them as they 'fly by,' so to speak. The second impression is that they are all being placed in an evolutionary and civilizational sequence in which the ideals of Han civilization are the metric. Viewed this way, the hill tribes are ranged from very 'raw' (primitive) to very cooked. Thus we get a series of the following kind: 'almost Han,' 'on-their-way-to-being-Han,' 'could-eventually-become-Han-if-they-wanted-to (and if-we-wanted-them-to!),' and, finally, a category (for the 'wildest' of the Lahu, for example) 'uncivilizable,' which meant, of course, 'not-really-human.'

It is a rare term for people at the periphery of state power—swiddeners, hill people, forest dwellers, or even peasants in the 'deep' countryside—that does not carry stigmatizing

connotations. For the Burmans, the term for villagers far from cultural centers is táw thà, literally, forest dweller, with the connotation of rustic, wild, and uncouth (yaín)."

Now all that is very interesting but it should not be surprising for readers of this book. Whether one is referring back to my discussions of the Cynics (whom the Greek civilised could despise as uncultured animals) or, earlier in this chapter, the African hunter-gatherers encapsulated by their more sedentary pastoralist and agriculturalist neighbours who referred to them in similar terms, we find that everywhere the civilising virus must attack those who refuse or resist coming under its auspices. In the previous chapter it was the uncivilised who are not like us (i.e. the civilised). In this chapter it is the indigenous. But who are the indigenous? What are the indigenous? Are they just the people in Scott's narrative who live at altitude or those in Clastres' narrative that live without a State? Are they the African hunter-gatherer tribes reported upon by anthropologists who suggest both a different past and an alternative life? Are they the modern political invention of peoples with ancient and traditional cultures that can be distinguished from the ones their colonisers imported and who are thought to require modern political recognition? I go back over my preceding text now in order to pull out some markers of an indigenous ethical and political character according to my interpretation.

Let me begin by restating the markers I started with:

1. Based in a simplicity of desire, and satisfying desires, in a context of an imagined abundance.

2. Based in a strong and direct connection to the wild. In fact, it would be life in the wild.

3. About locality and its contingency. The indigenous (like wild animals, in fact) form strong connections to place since their lives are all about where they are and being able to live their lives in such places, places which consequently become very meaningful to them.

4. About a “wild temporality” that is utterly foreign to civilised notions of clock time or what Mark Rifkin calls “Settler Time” in his book *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*. The point to note here is that the indigenous imagine time differently than the civilised. The sun and the moon mean much more to them than a clock does.

5. The indigenous are heirs of specific cultures (plural - no doubt encompassing specific and various beliefs, values, traditions and practices) which, in civilised terms, is never simply the mainstream or colonial culture. To be indigenous, then, is to develop one’s own diversity and particularity of being and becoming. It is to walk one’s own path with agency and autonomy.

6. The indigenous person is an uneconomic person (in contrast to the dictates, for example, of modern capitalism which requires each human adult to be an expressly economic person). They are not driven by profit, property or acquisition in general terms.

7. For such people existence is generally imagined as both social and self-sufficient at group level and as a polity.

8. The indigenous live in a world of dreams and a world that is alive. It is a world that encompasses both the material and the imaginary. This is precisely because it is a life lived in the wild.

How can I now add to, reconfigure or reformulate these descriptive characteristics to come to a fuller appraisal, informed by the preceding pages discussing other people's scholarship about ancient and indigenous peoples?

I begin this task by noting that we exist in a natural (but not inevitable or eternal) abundance. This is an indigenous appreciation of the natural environment to which such people always imagine an attachment as a co-existence. The indigenous live in the wild (as opposed to civilisation) but that is only to say that they live together with it as a part of it. They are not alienated from it but are part of it as it is part of them. This co-existence, this participation in a common life, is their abundance.

Consequently, this is a major condition of indigenous life – that it be lived as this co-existent participation in the wild. This acts as a natural arena for desire since such a life is, and cannot be, based on things or their acquisition. No indigenous people anywhere have ever built warehouses or started businesses with the aim of constructing international corporations and making profit at vast cost to their time, environment and polity. This is just not what they are about. Instead, the mentality is much more that life can be lived without extraneous desires – and that that might even be a better life. The indigenous judge affluence differently and do not have civilisational economic or political values. They are those who have realised that affluence can be achieved by wanting less – and finding oneself satisfied – instead of wanting more. And that without the chains that the latter will always bring with it for left unguarded desire becomes a chain that ties you to

it. For the indigenous life is a local and contingent participation in an intimate local reality, a being subject to one's own time and place which is neither clock time nor any place on a map. It is a law and a life unto itself. And so no community or society is inevitably on some developmental timeline, a stage on the road to somewhere better or even just somewhere else. Each exists on its own terms and with its own self-perpetuating impetus as something with value of itself. There is no meta-reality to this, no "world polity" that needs to be constructed from it. It is self-contained and complete in itself.

But there is more to this appreciation of life. For example, one cannot separate affluence from liberty or culture. Affluence is then not regarded as a singularly economic measure. What if it might actually be a matter of wild connections and the ability to exist without restriction or obligation (in Graeber and Wengrow's terms, to live "unstuck")? Then such people will have discovered an affluence that the people who live in civilisation have been deliberately deprived of, and are constantly told they need to be deprived of, "for their safety". Then there is the affluence of leisure, another form of riches the civilised find dubious since in the civilised world they are told that work makes you deserving and indolence is a sin. The indigenous quite simply put leisure before work as a general theme, both as mentalities and as values (for, as the Daoists say, "Doing nothing, nothing is left undone"). Both are linked to a visceral and bodily appreciation of life. Here we might remember the formula that Sahlins came up with: the more culture, the more work, the less leisure. So it is about values and how those are turned into relations. It is about both avoiding and embracing. It is about a more self-actualising responsibility for co-existence and the realisation that you don't have to do things that lead to what you regard as bad outcomes. Ways of life and their relations are consequential. Consequently, it is about the power of refusal of ways of life and relations that you don't want to have to

deal with the consequences of. Since no one can engage in that successfully alone, it is about ethics and politics as the self-ordering of a relational means of living.

Here we learn from the indigenous that relations between people are the inventions of people and not fate or necessities or inevitabilities. They are creations and so can be creations with purposes, either positive or negative, either to enable something or to make something impossible. They can be invented to create kinds of polity and/or to stop kinds of polity too. They can enshrine certain values and block certain others. They can include kinds of people and exclude kinds of people. They derive from “a momentum that is primarily internally derived”. When we read, for example, about the immediate-return and delayed-return hunter-gatherers in essays by Woodburn, we understand that Immediate and delayed return are about understandings of how people relate. Both, that is, assume that existence is social and so not about any “individual” for the imaginary of their existence is social from the off. Its also wider than the human as we see in the many ritual understandings of these existences that ethnographers report upon. An example here would be that of the forest as parent who gives irrespective of behaviour, worth or whether one is deserving or not. This itself implies a fundamental generosity of both spirit and life’s basic things. The world of the indigenous is an imaginal world that unites self, community, environment and cosmos in a continual generous interplay.

The indigenous teach taking responsibility for oneself as members of a community of life that is always based in that community’s own direct action. (I put it this way since the “community of life” concerned is always more than simply a community of human life.) The message here is that we are beings with agency and such agency should be utilised. Woodburn’s appraisal of the immediate-return hunter-gatherers is here instructive combining, as it does, an emphasis on nomadism without permanently settled place,

relations at the expense of determinative institutions, access to all of life's necessities in community as an expectation and a social understanding, the broader obligation to share, an anti-property injunction and a basically anarchic political understanding that discourages any genuine leaders with real power. (Power, if anything, seems shared in and by the community and is negotiated in and through their rituals and their back and forths in order that actual power struggles may never break out as such.) Quite frankly, this appears as a quite organically formed version of what anarchists might call an anarchist polity but is based on values that have developed in and from the wild (often, one imagines, in and through participation in it) and imaginaries of it rather than from any civilisationally derived theorising in the abstract. Indigeneity, that is, has developed in every case in and from its own wild circumstances as examples of agency, autonomy and free association in action as people self-organised their own lives together.

That this has come to be based, certainly as historical hypothesis with some material examples, in egalitarianism is interesting – as are the limits (for example, of group size) that this seems to impose. If we ask the question, as the Radical Anthropology Group do, of "What makes us human?", one might reply that the sort of indigeneity discussed in this chapter does. Indeed, this particular group of anthropologists argue that it literally and historically made us human since it provided the conditions for the development of language. So there one sees a combination of egalitarianism, autonomy and interdependency (together with the communication skills which greatly enhance further social cooperation) as the ground bed of "being human". But that suggests a delicate balance for if that is "being human" then do we risk becoming inhuman if that balance should be disturbed or, civilisationally speaking, broken apart on purpose? The indigenous, in many cases, appear to believe in "the immorality of accumulation", for example, but if we become turned into the accumulative and the acquisitive have we "lost

our humanity"? Such questions are abstract and not of the indigenous mentality I am here trying to describe. The indigenous are primarily concerned about themselves and their own lives and could be described as "insular" or "conservative" in that sense. But that seems to remind one of the ideas of someone like Max Stirner too with his egoistic assertions and his warning that replacing god with humanity was actually just to invent a new god. The indigenous certainly live in an enchanted world but it is not one in which the task is for them and their god to conquer all. They mind their own business and their own world and get on with their own life. Others should do the same.

So it is about living together with those with whom you have to do in participation. Life for the indigenous is a participation – in community, environment and cosmos. It is about developing skills and practices of relation, persuasion and dialogue. It is embodied and materially sited. It is about life processes – finding, feeding, fucking. It is all about relating in a world replete with nature's oscillations – of the moon and the sun and the seasons and particularly the female body. Consequently, it is an interesting suggestion that self-organising around sexual access is the beginning of political culture and morality in and through the cooperation that was encouraged by what Knight, Power and Watts, et. al. call "female cooperative coalitions". This puts a major fact of life (not least if one is evolutionary in their thinking) – SEX – at the centre of the discussion and asks how groups of humans deal with it and have dealt with it. It asks how a species will organise itself to bring up its offspring where this is never just a random thing but, for any species, ways develop which find their success. It suggests communal childcare as a notable thing for human communities to build themselves around. It suggests a form of life in which all would have an interest and which does not alienate anyone by reason of wealth or inequality of power or alienation of labour.

I think, with the Radical Anthropologists, that all this is anything but simple. If such a female-led egalitarianism, formulated around sexual access and communal childcare, is in fact of historical-material significance – and if it was the conditions under which language and symbolic thought in general was nurtured and developed – then it is possibly the most significant invention in the history of our species. And it is complex for can you imagine such an egalitarian situation in YOUR society? The conditions for it simply do not exist because those relations have in many places been completely destroyed and replaced by coercive and exploitative ones, not just with each other but with the material world.

And yet whilst I marvel at the complexity necessary in this scenario I also recognise that it manifests a simplicity that civilisation is also not capable of as it makes everything into a specialisation and obfuscates human lives to the point at which it is impossible to live without thousands of people you will never meet and don't know playing their part. This not only makes life as a whole overly complex but it also removes from people their simple liberty to live as they desire.

So in finally trying to understand the indigenous as described in these last one hundred or so pages I formulate their genius in the lives described as one of COMPLEX SIMPLICITY. They are simple in that they are concerned with themselves and what is to hand. But they are complex in that they have devised ways to live together in peace and equality. This amounts to being able to live in ways which combine autonomy with interdependence. And that I would call both complex and simple – something others would do well to aim for too.

BY WAY OF FERAL CONCLUSION...

Anarchy as Romance

Some years ago in an interview he was giving for a TV programme about his work, Alan Moore made the point, in discussing *V for Vendetta*, that anarchy is, and has always been, basically a *romance*. The claim made me sit up and take notice for not only did it then have the valency to suggest that *V for Vendetta* is itself some kind of (queer!) love story but it set the whole idea of anarchy itself *tout court* in the romantic arena. As intriguing as this idea is by itself, we need to understand, as of first importance, what Moore could mean by describing anarchy as a romance. What is a romance? What is it to be romantic? (And how, since the hundreds of preceding pages of this book are about a wild interpretation of anarchy that could itself be described as romance adjacent, is my interpretation of anarchy meant to fit into this romantic point of view as well?)

Romance, first and foremost, is a type of writing, a forerunner of the novel. In fact in some European countries (such as the Germany I once lived in or France) the novel is called a *Roman* which comes from the same linguistic roots as romance. As Adam Burgess informs us in a concise online article about the origins of the romance form of literature titled “Medieval Chivalric Romance”:

“*Chivalric romance is a type of prose or verse narrative that was popular in the aristocratic circles of High Medieval and Early Modern Europe. They typically describe the adventures of quest-seeking, legendary knights who are portrayed as having heroic qualities. Chivalric romances celebrate an idealized code of civilized behavior that combines loyalty, honor, and courtly love. The most famous examples are the Arthurian romances recounting the*

adventures of Lancelot, Galahad, Gawain, and the other 'Knights of the Round Table.' These include the Lancelot (late 12th century) of Chrétien de Troyes, the anonymous Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (late 14th century), and Thomas Malory's prose romance (1485). Popular literature also drew on themes of romance, but with ironic or satiric intent. Romances reworked legends, fairy tales, and history to suit the readers' (or, more likely, the hearers') tastes, but by 1600 they were out of fashion, and Miguel de Cervantes famously burlesqued them in his novel Don Quixote."

Laura Ashe, writing the introduction to the book *The Exploitations of Medieval Romance* adds that:

"*The romance is a forerunner of the novel; it is the narrative of the individual's movement through society and (sometimes) history; it is the genre in which fictionality re-emerged in the twelfth century, and yet also a vehicle in which culturally important ideologies and identities receive their full expression. This ambivalence was of course apparent to the writers and readers of romance from its earliest days, and was exploited in a variety of ways – not least for humorous effect… This is a useful reminder that the romance was born for a precise form of exploitation – the generation of patronage – and in the courtly romances written for courtly audiences, that desire is worn upon the sleeve.*"

Michael Ferber, in his *Very Short Introduction to Romanticism*, is eager to exegete a meaning for the associated and now retrospectively described "Romantic period" (primarily 1789-1832 – that period being demarcated as the one between the French Revolution and the British Reform Act) and in his initial survey he refers to Alfred de Musset's *Letters of Dupuis and Cotonet,* a book broadly of this time which attempts to

figure out what “romantic” is by gathering together all the multivarious uses of the term that can even then be found. Here one, from some anonymous scholar of the time, is that:

“*Romanticism is the weeping star; it is the sighing wind, the chilly night, the bird in its flight, and the sweet-scented flower; it is the refreshing stream, the greatest ecstasy, the well by the palm trees, rosy hope and her thousand lovers, the angel and the pearl, the white robe of the willows….*”

There might be something in this for Ferber also reports that one of the romantic German Schlegel brothers, Friedrich to be precise, found the romantic “in that age of chivalry, love, and fable, from which the phenomenon and the world itself derived.” Many attempts have been made to describe the Romantic period (a task more slippery than describing the original romantic novels) and, naturally enough, the values or characteristics that its various actors had in common. Some have thought it a fruitless venture, however, for it seems that almost nothing is in common between all those subsequently denominated “romantic”. However, if instead of definite commonalties we aver to the notion of family resemblances then certain ideas emerge.

René Wellek suggested that three “romantic norms” were “imagination for the view of poetry, nature for the view of the world, and symbol and myth of poetic style.” On the other hand, “Harold Bloom has claimed that Romanticism is ‘the internalization of quest romance’, a transformation of the heroic quests in medieval romances into interior spiritual journey” according to Ferber. Ferber himself imagines to give a standard definition of the Romantic period itself which is worth considering:

"*Romanticism was a European cultural movement, or set of kindred movements, which found in a symbolic and internalized romance plot a vehicle for exploring one's self and its relationship to others and to nature, which privileged the imagination as a faculty higher and more inclusive than reason, which sought solace in or reconciliation with the natural world, which 'detranscendentalized' religion by taking God or the divine as inherent in nature or in the soul and replaced theological doctrine with metaphor and feeling, which honored poetry and all the arts as the highest human creations, and which rebelled against the established canons of neoclassical aesthetics and against both aristocratic and bourgeois social and political norms in favor of values more individual, inward, and emotional.*"

He further adds to this later in his book to the effect that, in some senses, Romanticism was a counter to excessive applications of logic and reason, one that gave valency and validation to "sensitivity or emotional responsiveness". (One must give weight to the chronology of its appearance in a post-Enlightenment timeline and then see it as a countercultural movement of possibly political import or intent.) In this context it is not unimportant that Ferber notes the value of "the poet" to the Romantic Period. Indeed:

"*No characteristic of Romanticism is more prominent than the prestige, even glory, which it confers on the poet. He acquires the stature of prophet, priest, and preacher, of hero, law-giver, and creator; he grows almost into a god. 'We are on a mission', Novalis claimed in 1798: 'we are called to give shape to the earth'. 'Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world', Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote, in the final sentence of A Defence of Poetry (1821).*"

Meanwhile, in “Romanticism: The Brief History of A Concept”, Seamus Perry informs us that:

“*‘Romantic’ is current from the early seventeenth century, according to OED (The Oxford English Dictionary); and it means, unsurprisingly, ‘resembling the tales of romances’, as the first definition in Johnson’s dictionary puts it: either strictly, as a point of artistic classification, or more loosely, having the kind of qualities normally thought to characterize romance — ‘Improbable; false’, ‘Fanciful; full of wild scenery’ (Johnson's second and third definitions). OED has an engaging seventeenth-century example of simple outrage in ‘The romantic and visionary scheme of building a bridge over the river at Putney’; but it goes on to quote from the mid-nineteenth century, ‘A romantic scheme is one which is wild, impracticable, and yet contains something which captivates the fancy’. Such a softening of rational disapproval to a kind of charmed indulgence seems to characterize the word in the later eighteenth century; and this is the sense of ‘romantic’ as it features in the writers whom we now think of as themselves ‘Romantic’….*

A modern romanticist would probably not choose medievalism or romance or wondrous mystery as the central criteria for Romanticism, but rather, idealism and egotism, or perhaps primitivism and a turn to nature…

but by the time of Harold Bloom's significantly titled The Visionary Company (1961), (William) Blake has become the exemplary Romantic. The Visionary Company is greatly influenced by the work of Northrop Frye, who had himself earlier promoted the claims of Blake in Fearful Symmetry (1947), in the course of which book he had remarked with casual authority that ‘idealism is a doctrine congenial to poets’: a dubious rule of thumb; but it points to a rough equation between ‘Romanticism’ and ‘idealism’, which in turn affects the

working Romantic canon. Shelley ('All things exist as they are perceived': 'Defence of Poetry') and Blake ('Mental Things are alone Real') fit well enough and parts of Wordsworth too ('the mind is lord and master'; The Prelude)."

Much of this is confirmed, finally, by Andrew Maunder in his introduction to his *Encyclopedia of Literary Romanticism*. Here the romantic interest in poetry is not about "an imitation of human life" but "the inner feelings of the author". Such poetry, further, is meant to be "spontaneous", "arising from impulse" (and so related in some sense to authenticity and passionate feeling), and certainly not too artificial. Third, Maunder notes a "reverence for nature" that is common to the romantic mentality which leads to a fourth point, "a tendency to elevate humble and rustic life, including the ignominious, the outcast, and the delinquent as a way of enlarging the reader's imaginative sympathies." A fifth and final point is then "the sense of a 'supernatural' dimension, often reworking tales of mystery and magic." This is then filled out further on in the Introduction where we find that:

"*Rather than being primarily concerned with the rational, the Romantic period was fascinated with the irrational, the superstitious and mysterious; with madness, with feelings and with the imagination". The new emphasis was also much more on the subjective and the personal.*"

This latter focus could lead to political engagement. (If, that is, romances weren't simply political all along in their medieval origins as stories meant to flatter the courts of kings with tales of adventures and how the morality of the status quo wins out.) But as Maunder then reports:

"*By the 1780s many held the view that freedom and justice were being trampled by repressive governments. Romantic writers can thus be seen as being fired by the major events of their day, including the revolutionary upheavals taking place on both sides of the Atlantic… In fact, there were few Romantic writers who did not take an interest in political events and who were not engaged on some level with society around them.*"

This facet of Romantic characteristics, however, did not always go down so well as, depending on the politics of the critic concerned, it could be either good or bad accordingly. But even criticism tells us something about the Romantics perceived characteristics. Maunder, for example, reports on W.H. Auden's view thusly:

"*In The Oxford Book of Light Verse, produced in 1936, Auden suggested that, save for Byron, the Romantic poets 'turned away from the life of their time to the contemplation of their own emotions and the creation of imaginary worlds: Wordsworth to nature, Keats... to a world of pure poetry, Shelley to a future Golden Age'.*"

Where does this leave us then? It leaves us with improbable and fanciful fictions that might be perceived as a personal voice of perhaps naturalistic (wild!?) critique against an increasingly industrial and capitalist world that overtly employs symbolism (literary, artistic, poetic) and imagination in the pursuance of internal and imaginal worlds to which the authors are, or become, passionately attached. The Romantic is overtly the creative and not just of worlds but even of values which can surely be created by the energetic and active romanticist.

As such, I can see why the author of *V for Vendetta* describes anarchy as a romance – for he has clearly written it up as one. That book is a tale of adventure, of action and of love

for an ideal opposed to the norm. But what about my own writing which has been laid out for public display in the pages before you? Well this all sounds very much like me too, a few twists and turns aside, and I like the idea that anarchy is a story that is told with the aim of endearing itself to its hearers, an invitation to join in with the imagining of another world without governments or police or advertising or money or billionaire bastards who want to grind your dead corpse into the ground. Since I consider myself only to be the teller of sometimes very strange and convoluted stories, the cap seems to fit. So perhaps I should wear it.

In doing that, however, I am cognisant of the fact that if anarchy is a romance, a romantic story, an overt fiction, it can never simply be an entertainment. It is a story told with a point and a purpose, one in which the reader finds themselves addressed in the most consequential terms. Such a reader needs to have an answer for and to that address. Anarchy as romance is effectively "the greatest story ever told" if, as with those who have thought that story is about a certain Jesus of Nazareth, we conceive of it as about the meaning of life itself. Anarchy as romance is about the meaning of your, and everybody else's, life. Is it about how it is organised, what it is for, what you should or shouldn't do with that, what justice is or isn't, and basically any other existentially important question you could ask. I think that the Alan Moore who speaks about anarchy as romance understands that for at the end of *V for Vendetta* he simply presents the people of London with a choice: are you going to take the reigns of your own lives or are you going to give them away to power hungry and vicious others all over again? Are you going to embrace a naturalistic, wild freedom or are you going to settle down to imprisoned civilised life?

Such is the challenge of anarchy as romance. Such is the question with which it addresses its reader. It is a matter of being both a lover AND a fighter.

TAXONOMY OF “THE WILD: ETHICS AND ANTI-POLITICS”

PRELUDE (4)

Intro critiquing the later work of Murray Bookchin via Bob Black setting a basic definition of anarchy as “self-organising anti-authoritarianism that fights against centralising power by its own direct action.”

WILD SHOOTS

1. Rhizomatic Contexts, Relational Purposes (12)

Hipparchia; Deleuze’s n sexes and “the Deleuzean Queer” via Moore (invention, difference, connection); Hocquenghem’s unnameable desire; encouraging diversity and

proliferation; counteractualisation of the present; my own writing past with anarchy – a matter of relations and materiality as erotic and attractive, radical freedom to cooperative and promiscuous interaction; free spirits; the importance of imagination and the ability to transform; a war for kinds of relationship and social organisation; change the currency.

2. What is Nature? Nature As A Value (27)

Manner of operation; A Daoist take (ziran, spontaneity); Wohlleben on trees (cooperation, self-organisation, mutual aid, habitat creation, selfishness AND ecosystems); nature as self-organising, cooperative diversity that is an engine of transformation – in freedom; nature as events-in-relationship; Swamp Thing – the way of the wood as non-organisation of the whole; the ethics of nature cannot be human or teleological; Lynn Margulis – symbiosis, autopoiesis, Gaia (the biota are combining together to produce a liveable habitat); The Wicker Man as an example of infusing nature with meaning and significance; Soper on "nature" as a discursive item; observations on nature as a guide; first mention of "the wild"; human as part of nature which leads to critique of the Cynic position; nature not an authority; nature as anarchy when it becomes reimagined as "the wild"

3. Green Anarchy and Alienating Civilisation (96)

Anarchy, nature and government; Thoreau as an example of one who combined political independence with nature talk; Macfarlane and "Is A River Alive?" (living ecosystems and autonomous liveliness); Wolfi Landstreicher's egoistic and insurrectionary feral revolution and Alfredo Bonanno's commentary upon it building out the concept of "wild"; Chris Kortright and the journal "Feral" on a feral wildness – wildness is not anarchism or environmentalism but is becoming wild yourself; what is needed is a revolt against civilisation; Ted Kaczynski's analysis and the problem of technology and industry as things

which centralise, incarcerate and alienate, inducing a form of servitude, whilst, at the same time, being unpredictable and unhealthy in their consequences; such a system as putting bourgeois freedom before wild freedom; libertarian nihilism vs incarcerating civilisation.

4. The Politics of Everyday Life (161)

How should we live in a wild that evades all description?; Saul Newman and postanarchy – autonomy as key; Cynics; the Cynic's militant life as truth-telling which scandalises and defaces the currency of civilisation in Foucault; the Cynic as refusing civilisation and embracing nature in Desmond; Cynics as ethically feral (dogs) in Dobbin; answering the initial question of the chapter with the answer "autonomy" as both ethic and technique; the magical theory of language and conjuring forms of life; remaking values; ownness as our politics of everyday life.

WILD ASIDES

Abdullah Öcalan and the Misunderstanding of Anarchy (272)

Öcalan as a Bookchin disciple who makes Bookchin type errors; anarchy is not about "creating a system"; anarchism, let alone, anarchy, is not socialism or programmatic in nature; anarchism doesn't exist as a set body of doctrines and never has; desire over dogma; autonomy as key once again; civilisation versus the wild.

Wildness and Vulnerability: A Social and Cooperative Response (286)

Wildness and civilisation as imaginaries; one versus the other in my imaginary; 13 ways in which civilisation preaches security but delivers increasing vulnerability; Kropotkin's Mutual Aid in the context of Victorian evolutionary discussion according to Stephen Jay

Gould; Individualist interpretations of evolution as cultural not universal; as you value so will you see; the cooperative as the fittest; the benefits of cooperation and the wild as built upon that.

Daoism's "Philosophy of Nature" (313)

Wayism; a minimally discernible tradition in the Daodejing; the West as against nature, Daoism as not; the spontaneous, self-generating universe, a transforming universe (autopoiesis); diversity as primordial to this; the greater harmony and the lesser prosperity; Daoism as a primitivism that disdains knowledge as power base; unself-conscious action; ziran; as political; nothing beyond it's self-soing spontaneity; inexplicable self-creation; ziran as an interpretation of the universe; yin and yang – the balance of a circuit; Daoism is holistic; Daoism is about fluidity; Daoist values; Daofaziran.

WILD RELATIONS?

8. A Wild Anarchy of Life (339)

Kropotkin and mutual aid as impetus to sociability; Wohlleben and the sociability of trees; plants as different and social organisms partaking in a cooperative and competitive social world; intelligence and self-organisation as integral to all life; resulting in emergent behaviours; how this affects our conception of the wild; wild nature as anarchy.

9. Inventing Cultural Creations (378)

Life in relationship as creative of culture as seen in and through interviews with Foucault; relations create their participants in their being related; for example, when truth is imagined as a weapon for partisan victory and conversation is imagined as a war; positionality and how we conceive or enter into the relation defines both how it will be

conducted and what can be achieved; cultures and cultural differences; the economics of sexual behaviour in society and the role of the creation of knowledges; transforming yourself through intellectual endeavour and this as a form of ethics (the relationship you have to yourself); building your own ethics and ethics of pleasure; friendship as a way of life and utilising sexuality to facilitate a multiplicity of relationships; inventing new ways of being in relationships; people should have the freedom necessary to modify their own relations; new relationships will be regarded by the civilised as transgressive; sex as the possibility for creative life; the necessity of forms of life, cultures, which instantiate the life itself; what identity is and is not; power relations; the benefits of being without a program and institutions; my conclusions and consequences.

10. Gustav Landauer on Anarchist Relationships (417)

Intro to Landauer; his hybridised form of anarchy-socialism; his pacifism; through separation to community; a relational anarchy; revolution; reference to La Boétie; anarchy comes from within – spirit as inner sovereignty; The Socialist Bund; autonomous communities of egoists; Landauer as very much prefigurative in his anarchy; twelve articles; Landauer a more socialised Armand.

WILD GROWTHS (OF QUEER NIHILISTIC ANARCHY)

11. Queer Nihilism (466)

Polysexuality; Jouissance; Queer via Hocquenghem – liberating energies (bodies, desires) and destroying (capitalist) sexuality; Baedan's Journal of Queer Nihilism and Edelman's No Future; anti-politics but not apolitical; queer as pure negative expression without goal or teleology; queer as destructive threat and infinite sabotage operation; civilisation needs enemies which is why it manufactures them; the queer role as the persistent death drive;

not fighting for the children or reproductive futurity but fighting for yourselves; Camatte's Against Domestication (colonising capital); refusing our intelligibility; jouissance redux; uncivilised desire; queer autonomous groups; language and civilisation as traps for bodily desire – a domesticating process; the problem is to create other lives; queerness as wildness; three billion perverts as gays speaking for themselves; you are not allowed to imagine another world; some examples of those who do and instantiate queer nihilism in so doing; proceeding on the basis of refusal.

12. Uncivilised (554)

Green anarchy; civilisation the precise problem; a de-civilising, de-domestication project; civilisation described in multiple terms including possible responses to it; technology; what is our uncivilised point – why are we existing as the uncivilised? – destruction, desire and direct action (autonomy); a wild imperative in contradiction to civilisation; dispelling with paradigms (the need for diversity of action and response); discussion around CCTV as anti-wild and anti-feral; colonisation and the need for decolonisation; civilisation's use of estrangement and alienation and how connectivity attacks this; Ward Churchill's work on being "indigenist"; the anti-nature attitude of European colonial civilisation in contrast to the native's reverence for life; Merlin Sheldrake on fungus as a wild, uncivilised metaphor; symbiosis and transformation everywhere all over again

13. Indigenous (621)

Indigenous a mentality rather than a modern political status; the original affluent society and discussing what affluence even is; Woodburn's immediate-return hunter-gatherers and the practical egalitarian basis of small group life in the wild; civilisational animus against such people; critiquing The Dawn of Everything; its not about "the dawn of everything" but it is about "how can we improve civilisation?"; the authors' similarity to

Bookchin; the authors' disdain for positive egalitarian examples such as Woodburn's hunter-gatherers; the Radical Anthropology Group and the FCC model of peaceful egalitarian evolution; the research of Morna Finnegan on native forms of this as bodily visceral sexual politics and sociality; how wild living requires a cosmology (imagination); the civilisationalist's inability to value the wild; that relations make your now and liberating relations; Clastres on civilised readings of the indigenous and readings which reveal their insights – the different values at work; that life is based on your imaginary of it; civilisation is not the standard; there is no evolutionary inevitability – it is not inevitable to be civilised; James C. Scott on those who live outside the State in S.E. Asia and who are thus regarded as uncivilised, barbarians, outlaws, etc.; reformulating an identification of "indigenous" characteristics – most importantly that it is (in the) wild; the indigenous judge affluence differently; relations are the inventions of people; discussing indigenous values; complex simplicity.

BY WAY OF FERAL CONCLUSION

Anarchy as Romance (737)

What is a romance?; a type of literature perhaps produced due to patronage; the Romantic period; imagination, nature, poetry; a counter to logic and reason; the connection to inner feeling; the political involvement of the Romantics; the challenge of anarchy as romance.